UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PADOVA

Università degli Studi di Padova

Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari

Corso di Laurea in
Lingue e Letterature Straniere

Tesi di Laurea

The bestiary and Henryson's "Morall Fabillis"

Symbolic animals in Middle English literature

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Anno Accademico 2011/2012

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Foreword

This study is a comparison of symbolic animals in the bestiaries and in Henryson's *Morall Fabillis*[1]. For the bestiaries the texts examined are four of the most important Latin versions and one English manuscript, dating between the thirteenth and the fourteenth century and in circulation in England during the Middle Ages. These are the *Aberdeen Bestiary* (Aberdeen University Library, MS 24)[2], the *Cambridge Bestiary* (Cambridge University Library, MS Ii. 4.26)[3], the MS Bodley 764[4], the *Peterborough Bestiary* (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 53)[5] and the *Middle English Bestiary* (British Library, Arundel MS 292)[6]. The reason for the choice of these two texts, bestiary and fables, is that they may symbolize the two genres concerning animals which are most representative in Middle English literature.

From Henryson's *Morall Fabillis* five animals were selected, which could be the most typical of the genre. Therefore, the same animals were picked out from the numerous beasts of the bestiary's texts. Each of the two chapters of this study, "The Bestiary" and "The Fable", considers the selected animals. In the bestiary the study concerns their characteristics and the meaning that they take for the exegetical purposes of the writer. In Henryson's *Morall Fabillis* the speaking animals, which feature human behaviour, are picked out from the different fables in which they are involved and then are considered in their physical characteristics, behaviour and

[1] *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, edited by Robert L. Kindric, Kalamazoo, Michigan: Western Michigan University, 1997.

[2] *Aberdeen Bestiary*, Colin McLaren & Aberdeen University Library in *http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary*, Dicember 2011.

[3] *Il Bestiario di Cambridge*, introduced by Francesco Zambon, presented by Umberto Eco, Parma - Milano: Ricci, 1974.

[4] *Bestiary*, translated and introduced by Richard Barber, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1993.

[5] *Il Bestiario di Peterborough*, introduced by Lucy Freeman Sandler, transcription of the Latin text by Christopher De Hamel, translation of the Latin text by Valerio Marucci, Roma: Salerno, 2004.

[6] *Il Bestiario Medio Inglese*, edited by Dora Faraci, L'Aquila – Roma: Japadre Editore, 1990.

interpretation of the author.

The comparison between the two texts for each animal is developed inside the fables' chapter, precisely in the sections "features and behaviour" and "symbolic meaning" of each animal report. What may be gained from such a study is that the comparison between symbolic animals in the Middle English literature may sharpen the focus on difference and similarity on the meaning under which each animal is recognized.

It is obvious that, considering the different type of texts, the comparison between them may get into some interpretative difficulties. This is an inevitable risk, however, the achieved result should give, even when the meanings do not correspond, a comprehensive and combined summary of what animals could symbolize and signify in the collective imagination in England during the Middle Ages.

In both chapters the animals' section follows a preliminary introduction to the respective literary genre.

1. The Bestiary

1.1. A literary genre

The bestiary, or the book of beasts, as the name itself suggests, is an account of the natural world. It represents a specific literary genre in the European Middle Ages, consisting of a collection of stories based on the description of certain qualities of a number of beasts. Given this definition, it could be perceived as a zoological treatise on the natural world, but it is far from being of a scientific kind.[7] The fantastic elements with which most of the manuscripts of this genre deal are a clear sign of this peculiarity. Not only real but also mythical and imaginary animals are described in this collection. Indeed, for the medieval man there was no distinction between real and unreal animals upon condition that they had a symbolic meaning. In the list of beasts of the bestiary, as well as the lion, the snake, the elephant, the fox, the dove and so on, there are also the phoenix, the siren, the dragon and the unicorn. These imaginary or mythical animals could be reasonably conceived by the medieval mind because of their social and symbolic significance. In this respect the Holy Scriptures are an important point of reference. For example in the Old Testament the imaginary and terrible monster of the Leviathan is described as a sea creature of legendary strength:

> Fervescere faciet quasi ollam profundum mare, et ponet quasi cum unguenta bulliunt. Post eum lucebit semita, aestimabit abyssum quasi senescentem. Non est super terram potestas, quae comparetur ei, qui factus est ut nullum timeret. Omne sublime videt, ipse est rex super universos filios superbiae.
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> Iob (41,22-25)[8]

[7] Dora Faraci, "Introduzione", in *Il Bestiario Medio Inglese*, L'Aquila – Roma: Japadre Editore, 1990, Il *Physiologus*, p. 7.

[8] Biblia Sacra vulgate editionis (Roma 1592) in *http://bibbia.signum.sns.it* , September 2011. " It makes the depths churn like a boiling caldron and stirs up the sea like a pot of ointment. It leaves a glistening wake behind it; one would think the deep had white hair. Nothing on earth is its equal - a creature without fear. It looks down on all that are haughty; it is king over all that are proud." translation by The New International Version NIV in *http://www.biblegateway.com*, September 2011.

It is a very large, frightening and invincible wild beast which rules with cruelty over all other sea creatures. It crawls like a snake leaving at its passage a white wake in the sea. The skin of its back is shaped by a double layer of impenetrable plates similar to shields, while its stomach has sharp bulges. No weapon can hurt it. Smoke comes out of its nose and flames spit out of its jaws. It could be the description of a hellish creature and in the course of time the Leviathan has represented primitive chaos, uncontrolled power, even though, in the Biblical spirit, it is often the expression of God's will and the symbol of the extraordinary power of the Creator. The last Book of the New Testament, the Book of Revelation of John, says:

> Et vidi de mari bestiam ascendentem, habentem capita septem, et cornua decem, et super cornua eius decem diademata, et super capita eius nomina blasphemiae.
>
> Apocalypsis Ioannis (13,1)[9]

A strong and terrifying creature comes out of the sea; it resembles a leopard, has feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. A dragon gives it the power "to wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them" (Revelation 13, 7). In this case the beast is the unambiguous symbol of the forces of evil in the struggle against God. Therefore, the fact that the Holy Scriptures deal with strange and unreal animals and their widespread diffusion, particularly in the Middle Ages, is the sign that the medieval audience was already used to imaginary animals.

Given what has been said thus far, though the bestiary is a description of the natural world, it looks at it in a different way. The details on the behaviour and features of animals are rarely based on real observation and knowledge. In fact, the main interest of the medieval writers is to seek allegorical interpretations and symbolic relationships beyond natural lore. Indeed, the actual existence of the animal

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All quotations from the Bible are taken from this version.

[9] "And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns, and on each head a blasphemous name."

is unimportant, unless it has a didactic, moral and edifying intent.

The structure of the bestiary itself, based on the analysis of most of the existing manuscripts, discloses this purpose. The section concerning each animal is generally composed of two parts: usually a short description of the characteristics and behaviour of the beast, accompanied by a moralising text, that aims to give to the animal a special moral meaning or a relevant symbolism in Christian doctrine. All creatures are thought to have significance beyond themselves, thus providing moral, didactic or religious codes of behaviour. Their features or behaviour may lead the audience to recognize specific types of human beings embodying characteristics of God or the devil, thus enabling to learn the proper conduct of life, imitating God and fleeing from the devil.[10] Indeed, vices and virtues are recognizable in each animal. For example the ant and the bee display the virtues of humility, obedience and industry; the viper warns against the sin of adultery while the danger of pride is found in the tiger and the peacock, as that of lust in the siren and the goat. Some animals may represent more than one sin and, according to the context, one animal can have and often has both positive and negative attributes. This suggests that this kind of symbolism was well known and widely used in the Middle Ages.

Therefore, the analysis of the bestiaries are the logical starting point for understanding animal allegory and imagery found in many other contexts. Indeed, they exerted a strong influence in other genres dedicated to clarifying the natural world or to use the symbolic potential of animals in various works such as nature treatises, encyclopaedias, biblical commentaries, fables, exempla, romances and

[10] Michael J. Curley, "Introduction", in *Physiologus*, Austin & London: University of Texas Press, 1979, pp. xiv-xvi.

epic.[11]

Decorations and illustrations often supplement the texts of the bestiary manuscripts, making some of them luxury books of fine workmanship with miniatures and decorated initials. Likewise, the texts present a wide variety of pictures within their texts, subjects that we may see in heraldry (e.g. the griffin, the antelope, the pelican, phoenix, heraldic ensigns of noble families) or in the strange creatures carved in architectural elements, such as arches, columns, niches of mainly religious buildings. The sign of the influence of these bestiary elements in other contexts is so widespread that nowadays we, maybe unawares, still live with the effects of their fusion.[12]

The bestiary is among the most fascinating books of the Middle Ages. From the twelfth century onwards there was a real spread of the genre which reached its climax in the thirteenth century, when these picture-books were as popular as illustrated Apocalypses and Psalters.[13] Although often the existing manuscripts of bestiaries are dissimilar in structure, style and contents, their genre depends on a rich accumulation, collection and development of classical lore.[14] A store of scientific notions, fables, legends and tales, collected and moulded in the Greek book *Physiologus*, is actually the basis of the twelfth and thirteenth-century bestiaries.

1.2. The sources

The recovery of classical culture as essential for the present time and the belief that ancient texts are not only past evidence but, above all, important references

[11] Debra Hassig, "Introduction", in *The Mark of the Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life, and Literature*, New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1999, p. *xii*.

[12] Rhodes James Montague "The Bestiary" in *Eton College Natural History Society Annual Report* (1930-1931), p. 13.

[13] Debra Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 1.

[14] Hassig,"Introduction", in *The Mark of the Beast*, p. xv.

available to the existing authors, is a common belief in the Middle Ages. Therefore medieval writers quote their auctores (authorities) and often depend on the works of ancient authors to be reliable to their readers, almost totally renouncing to originality and objectivity.[15] The author of the Physiologus, for example, is quoted in most bestiaries as the ultimate authority.[16]

The *Physiologus*, a collection of fabulous stories describing the nature and the qualities of animals, birds, plants and stones, is the product of an early Christian culture and therefore an attempt to define the natural world in Christian terms: pagan tales and legends were shaped according to the new spirit of Christian moralization and scriptural teaching of the Old and New Testament.

Although there is no general agreement on the date and place of composition, it is recognized that the *Physiologus* was originally put together in Greek, probably in the second century AD, in or near Alexandria.[17] Between the second and the fifth century AD Alexandria was the common ground where pagan and Christian learning and cultures met and mingled. It was also the place where Origen and Clement lived, who were among the most important Christian theologians.[18] There the traditions of the classical world were set together with Christian interpretations and commentaries. Legends concerning beasts, stones and trees, a lot of which we find allegorized in *Physiologus,* were part of folklore since the fifth century BC and they have strongly influenced literature and art in the course of history and down to the present time. From Indian, Hebrew and Egyptian legends, through Greek and Roman expressions of art, up to Alexandrian handbooks, many of these legends came down

[15] Richard Barber, "Introduction", in *Bestiary*, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1993, p. 7.
[16] Barber, "Introduction", p. 8.
[17] Curley,"Introduction", pp. x- xxi.
[18] Hanneke WirtJes, *The Middle English Physiologus*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, pp. 14-15.

by the hand of ancient scientific writers, such as Pliny (*Natural History*) and Aelian (*History of the Animals*)[19], to the early Christian world.[20] Their simplicity and ready adaptability to large cultural contexts, religious as well as secular, were one of the reasons of their popularity and diffusion.

The Greek term φυσιολόγος (*Physiologus*), which is generally translated into English as 'naturalist', has in fact a different meaning. The chapters of the book often begin with a Biblical citation followed by "the Physiologus has said concerning ..." and conclude with the sentence "And so the Physiologus has spoken well concerning...".[21] The term was originally understood as referred to a person, not the title of the book: who this person was will probably remain unknown. However, it is unlikely that he embodies a natural historian. Indeed, he interprets metaphysically, morally and mystically the transcendent significance of the natural world. When he says that we should look beyond living creatures, he means that the visible world should lead us to understand the invisible one.[22] In the Christian view, the visible entities are the sign of the invisible hand of God Himself and in this perspective the universe is a vast repertoire of divine signs. [23]

The bestiary is not a study of nature for its own sake, but it has the purpose of educating and guiding sinful human beings.

> Nimirum interroga iumenta, et docebunt te: et volatilia caeli, et indicabunt tibi. Loquere terrae, et respondebit tibi: et narrabunt pisces maris. Quis ignorat quod omnia haec manus Domini fecerit?
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> Iob (12,7-9)[24]

[19] Curley,"Introduction", p. xxi.
[20] Curley, "Introduction", p. ix.
[21] P.T. Eden, "Introduction", in *Theobaldi Physiologus*, Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1972, p. lxxii.
[22] Curley, "Introduction", p. xiv.
[23] Curley, "Introduction", pp. x-xi.
[24] "But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this?"

In this Biblical verse Job replies to Sophar extolling God's power and wisdom. Through his creatures God shows mankind the way to redemption. Nature becomes therefore a kind of moral entity which preaches the model of Christian behaviour.[25] This allegorical way of looking at the natural world has its roots in the Judeo-Christian methods of biblical exegesis practised in Alexandria.

Almost every section of the *Physiologus* contains the description of the characteristics of the beast and continues with its Christian allegorical interpretation. The subjects are sometimes mythical beasts or, when ordinary ones, they are supplied with imaginary elements which are functional to the symbolic explanation: this could denote an intentional will to subordinate the natural and scientific observation to the theological approach. For example, the eagle is said to be of keen vision – "Aquila ad acumine oculorum vocata, tanti enim dicitur esse"[26] – but when it becomes old, worn and tired, it seeks out a spring, where it descends and immerses three times, after which it is completely restored to its previous strength, as highlighted by the following excerpt:

> Cum vero senuerit, gravantur ale ipsius, et obducuntur caligine oculi eius. Tunc querit fontem et contra eum evolat in altum usque ad aerem solis, et ibi incendit alas suas similiter et caliginem oculorum exurit in radio solis. Tunc demum descendens in fontem trina vice se mergit, et statim renovatur in multo vigore alarum, et splendore oculorum.[27]

While the first property of the animal, i.e. its sharp eyes, is a characteristic that has always been recognized as a real virtue of the eagle, the behaviour cited above is somehow "created" to urge man to seek the spiritual spring of God, where his youth

[25] Barber, "Introduction", p. 7.

[26] "The eagle is so called because of the sharpness of its eyes" from the Aberdeen Bestiary (Aberdeen University Library MS 24), Colin McLaren & Aberdeen University Library, text and translation in *http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary*, November 2011.

[27] "When the eagle grows old, however, its wings grow heavy, and its eyes grow dim. Then it seeks out a spring and, turning away from it, flies up into the atmosphere of the sun; there it sets its wings alight and, likewise, burns off the dimness in its eyes in the sun's rays. Descending at length, it immerses itself in the spring three times; immediately it is restored to the full strength of its wings, the former brightness of its eyes." Like the previous note this is taken from the Aberdeen Bestiary.

will be renewed like that of the eagle:

> Sic et tu homo qui vestimentum habes vetus, et caligant oculi tui, que re spiritualem fontem domini et eleva mentis oculos ad deum qui est fons iusticie et tunc renovabitur sicut aquile iuventus tua.[28]

It is no accident that the original core of the *Physiologus* is made of Biblical animals which are mainly introduced by a Biblical citation at the beginning of each chapter. Likewise the language used is simple and close to that of the New Testament. Among the imaginary beasts with which the *Physiologus* deals there is the unicorn, a small animal, that looks like a kid, but very fierce and with one horn in the middle of the brow. Its presence, even if under linguistic misunderstandings, is found in the Old Testament, where the translation of the Seventy from Hebrew to Greek (in the third century BC in Alexandria) depicted it like a fierce and untameable beast. The following and final Latin translation – the Vulgate of St Jerome – was officially adopted from the Roman Church giving the start to the Christian interpretation of the myth of the unicorn and thereby introducing the unicorn in literature.[29] Other ordinary animals included in the Greek *Physiologus*, like the elephant, the deer, the lion, the pelican, the fox, the dove and so on also appeared in the Bible, whose links and references were clearly cited in each chapter of the *Physiologus*, often as preliminary remarks.

The early *Physiologus* consisted of about fifty chapters concerning animals, stones and plants, set with no definite order. No Greek manuscripts survive from the early period. However Francesco Sbordone reconstructed the source type of the early

[28] "In the same way, you, O man, with your old clothes and dim eyes, should seek the spiritual spring of the Lord and raise the eyes of your mind to God, the fount of righteousness, and your youth will be renewed like that of the eagle." Like the previous note this is taken from the Aberdeen Bestiary.

[29] Martina Tinti, *Unicorno: un simbolo tra sacro e profano*, 2010 in *http://www.artearti.net/magazine*, October 2011.

translation from the later Greek versions.[30] He published in 1936 the existing Greek text of *Physiologus.*[31] The earliest surviving texts were only Latin translations.

The book was used by the Fathers of the Church as an instrument of early Christian preaching. Indeed, it was the "natural" medium to reach the widest possible audience, as churchgoers were already familiar with its appealing content. The consequence was extraordinary: eleven centuries of constant and fast spread. It is said that in Europe the *Physiologus* was second only to the Bible in its popularity and wide circulation. It was inevitable that the *Physiologus* should become a constant source of medieval religious expression in art, iconography, didactic poetry, preaching manuals and textbooks.

The widespread impact on the literature and art of the later Middle Ages began with the earliest translation of the Greek text into Ethiopic toward the beginning or middle of the fifth century AD. Shortly afterwards the Syrian and Armenian versions were composed.[32] From then onward, the text was translated into virtually every European vernacular, including Old English and Icelandic. In its continental versions, the text of *Physiologus* is short and relatively settled without substantial variations. Its content continued to evolve from the original, accumulating more beasts and additional moral interpretations. In the course of time it also underwent alterations in form, style and contents developing into the Latin and Romance bestiaries of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The earliest Latin version of *Physiologus* appeared between the fourth and the sixth century. The Latin translations appear in four versions: *Y* version (Bern, Lat. 611, eighth-ninth century),

[30] WirtJes, "Introduction", pp. 14-15.
[31] Quoted in Ana Stoykova, *Introduction to Physiologus,* 1994 in *http://physiologus.proab.info,* October 2011.
[32] Curley, "Introduction", The Date, p. xix.

A version (Brussels, Bib. Roy. 10074, tenth century), *C* version (Bern Burgerbibliothek, lat. 318, ninth century) and *B* version (Bern, Lat. 233, eight-ninth century).[33] The last one is best represented in the medieval West and is the most independent from the Greek source. This version is the main source from which the later Latin versions and bestiaries developed.

The *Physiologus* was also known in Anglo-Saxon England, where an "unusual" version, the so-called Old English *Physiologus*, was found in the Exeter Book (Exeter, Cathedral Library, MS 3501), one of the major collections of Old English poetry.[34] Written some time between the mid-ninth and mid-tenth centuries, attributed to Cynewulf – though this attribution is debated –, folios 95b-98a of this manuscript contain only three animal extracts, respectively on the panther, the whale and a bird usually taken to be the partridge.[35] It is not clear whether these three items are a fragment of a complete translation of the *Physiologus* – their sequence is the same in most Latin manuscripts – or whether they are an intentional attempt on the part of the author to create a single poem, as their formal unity and completeness show.[36] It could be the outcome of a revision, the aim of which is not to be a direct translation of the traditional version, but a conscious attempt of the author to produce an original text. It has been valued as the earliest and almost unique European vernacular version of *Physiologus*.

Excerpts from the *Physiologus* began to appear in texts that had influenced the evolution of the genre, like the *Dicta Chrysostomi* – the earliest manuscript of which dates from the eleventh century – the bases of the German translations.

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[33] Aberdeen Bestiary (Aberdeen University Library MS 24), Colin McLaren & Aberdeen University Library, in *http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary,* December 2011.

[34] WirtJes, "Introduction", p. 1.

[35] WirtJes, "Introduction", pp. 1-4.

[36] WirtJes, p. 23.

From the *Dicta Chrysostomi* stemmed the *Theobaldus-Physiologus.*[37] Probably compiled in the eleventh century, it was a verse account that exceeded in popularity all other versions during the Middle Ages.[38] This short work – it deals only with thirteen creatures and their moralisations – is identified as a model for the Middle English *Physiologus* and consequently for bestiaries. Its author arranged the traditional material so as to create a quick digest of easy popularization. The text was well known and used throughout Europe also as a school text, sometimes provided with commentaries during the later Middle Ages.[39] The surviving manuscripts of the Latin verse *Theobaldus-Physiologus* are sixty-four and are without illumination.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries there was a real proliferation of Latin works which changed and extended the Greek source. As a result, by the end of the twelfth century a new form of popular nature-book had developed under the generic name of "bestiary". This genre tended to absorb all animal legends, including those of the *Physiologus.*[40]

The bestiaries also rapidly attracted all kinds of new material, especially from scientific and encyclopaedic sources. They drew from a number of writers; in particular it is worth noted the contribution from the three that follow. The first and earliest writer is Julius Solinus, who in the early third century compiled a sort of travel guide known as *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* (Collection of Remarkable Things), largely elaborating Pliny's *Naturalis historia* (Natural History) and dealing with history, geography and natural history. Like other pagan sources, this material was not moralized. The second, Ambrose of Milan, compiled the *Hexaemeron*

[37] Eden, p. lxxix.
[38] Curley, p. xxviii.
[39] Eden, p. lxxvi.
[40] Curley, p. xxx.

around 380, a work on the six days of creation describing moralized animals according to Christian principles in the same compositional technique as the *Physiologus*. The third but foremost writer was Isidore of Seville (d. 636), who in the seventh century wrote the *Etymologiae* (Etymologies), an encyclopaedia in twenty books. In particular Book XII, entitled *De animalibus*, was an enormous volume of animal lore where the author sought to describe the natural habits or characteristics of the animals through the analysis of their name and also with classical learning, omitting allegories or moralisations of any kind.[41]

The new input on the original material of the *Physiologus* brought some important alterations in the form and the contents of the book. The impulse to expand the original inventory of the *Physiologus* increased the forty-odd chapters of the original Greek text to a hundred in some of the Latin bestiaries.[42] This expansion is due especially to the addition of northern fauna to the north African beasts of the original *Physiologus*. [43] Indeed, the moralizations were mostly dropped as the result of a predominant attention to the naturalistic elements; the connection between nature and its interpretation became feeble under new and different meanings and uses, such as ethical and moral teaching and rules – with this transposition the text ceased to be sacred. The separation of the different items in distinct kinds of books brought to collect birds in the aviary, the other animals in the bestiary, minerals in the lapidary and plants in the herbarium – these last two shift their interest to the description of the characteristic of their objects rather than to their moralization. The strong inclination for the systematic classification of all the material by then collected brought also to a distinction between quadrupeds, birds, reptiles and fish –

[41] Rhodes, p. 12.
[42] Curley, p. x.
[43] Barber, p. 13.

according to Isidore's classification in Book XII of his *Etymologiae*. Finally, but not less significantly, bestiary manuscripts began to be furnished with illuminations, a peculiarly English phenomenon.[44]

The proof of the popularity of the bestiary in its Latin prose form is the large number of manuscripts produced in England (thirty–seven in all).[45] In addition to Latin works there was a proliferation of other versions, for example the widely known *Bestiary* (ca. 1121) composed by Philippe de Thaün, an Anglo-Norman poet who dedicated the book to Queen Adela, Henry I's second wife, or the *Bestiary* of the early thirteenth-century Norman poet Guillaume le Clerc, or Guillaume le Normand, which was one of the principal vehicles for transmitting in the vernacular the *Physiologus* lore to the later Middle Ages. In particular *Li Bestiaire d'amour* (Bestiary of Love), written by Richard de Fournival and in circulation by the end of the thirteenth century, was a milestone in the evolution of the genre. Richard de Fournival represented the traditional bestiary lore with a new interpretation in the style of the love poetry popular at court during his time; the result was a "secular" bestiary in which animals were the figures of profane love.[46]

In Italy the bestiary tradition began in Tuscany during the mid-thirteenth century.[47] The *Bestiario moralizato*, a sixty-four sonnet collection, dating the beginning of the fourteenth century, put together the *Physiologus*'s repertoire with practical moral teachings. Likewise, the *Fiori di virtù* and the short bestiary by Leonardo da Vinci both deal with animals representing them as symbols of vices and virtues for the edification of human nature. The encyclopaedic trend is attested in *Li*

[44] Barber, p. 11.
[45] Eden, p. lxxvi.
[46] Hassig, 1995, p. 8.
[47] Curley, p. xxxii.

Livres dou Tresor, an encyclopaedia of the Florentine Brunetto Latini and in the bestiary of Cecco d'Ascoli included in book III of *Acerba*.[48]

The bestiary had a very long and complex literary history and enjoyed a considerable popularity. It was rendered into almost every European language, including Welsh, Icelandic and Irish. Its attractiveness lay in the fact that it was a popular picture book. It has survived in numerous examples in the form of separate book or as part of anthologies of various types.

1.3. Texts

The oldest bestiaries were written in the twelfth century and appeared in England in Latin, the ordinary language spoken by scholars and clerics in the Middle Ages. The Latin bestiary is particular an outcome of England, even if a few were produced elsewhere. As well as the Latin versions, many others were written in vernacular languages, namely mostly in French. Several vernacular verse bestiaries appeared in various dialects of what is now French and we know the names of their authors: Gervaise, Guillaume le Clerc, Philippe de Thaün, Pierre de Beauvais, etc. In most other cases the authors or compilers are unknown. The majority of extant examples are from England and France, but a large number are also from Italy, Catalonia and Castile.[49] The only text in English, found in only one manuscript, is the *Middle English Bestiary* (London, British Library, Arundel MS 292).

Some scholars have attempted to classify the many extant manuscripts according to the concept of "families". By studying the composition of each bestiary and disclosing the resemblances and the relations among the many manuscripts, scholars were able to group texts according to size, textual contents and animals'

[48] Luigina Morini, *Bestiari Medievali*, Torino: Einaudi, 1987, pp. XIX-XXI.
[49] Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries*, p. 1.

order.[50] The first to attempt such a classification of the Latin manuscripts was M.R. James in 1928, who defined four families into which he placed 41 texts. Over the years the concept of bestiary families has been debated and many scholars have proposed revisions of James's family classification. A later and clearer study of both Latin and French bestiaries was undertaken, in 1959 and then in 1962, by Florence McCulloch.[51] The various revisions have contributed to identify a great number of manuscripts and their sources, as well as clear up the relationships between model and copy. Through the correspondences in texts and images and the stylistic comparison with other types of manuscripts, it is possible to attribute to the approximately forty surviving English manuscripts their date and place of production.[52] However, a satisfying classification system has yet to be found.

The bestiary has not one, but many versions. Textual contents, selection and order of the beasts, layout and artistic techniques of text and images vary across the different texts. In the realization of images, for example, MS 22 (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College) and MS Laud Misc. 247 (Oxford, Bodleian Library) include only single line drawings on uncoloured grounds, whereas the *Aberdeen Bestiary* MS 24 (Aberdeen University Library), MS Bodley 764 (Oxford, Bodleian Library) and the *Ashmole Bestiary* MS Ashmole 1511 (Oxford, Bodleian Library), being luxury manuscripts, have painted images on gold grounds. The layout is also different, corresponding to that of other contemporary books in the place and period in which the manuscript was composed. Some of the earlier bestiaries – MS 22, the

[50] Quoted in "What is a Bestiary" in the Introduction of Aberdeen Bestiary (Aberdeen University Library MS 24), Colin McLaren & Aberdeen University Library, in *http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary*, January 2012.

[51] Quoted in"What is a Bestiary" in the Introduction of Aberdeen Bestiary (Aberdeen University Library MS 24), Colin McLaren & Aberdeen University Library, in *http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary*, January 2012.

[52] Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries*, p. 2.

Cambridge Bestiary MS Ii. 4.26 (Cambridge, University Library), *Nuneaton Book* MS McClean 123 (Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum) and the *Trinity Bestiary* MS R.14.9 (Cambridge, Trinity College) – are arranged in a two-column format. However most of the more costly luxury books – the *Morgan Bestiary* MS M. 81 (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library), Aberdeen, Ashmole, Bodley 764, MS Royal 12.C.XIX (London, British Library), MS 61 (Oxford, St. John's College) – have, however, the text arranged in a single column above and below the miniature.[53]

A general and broad outline of some of the texts may be traced. Based on the items contained in the bestiary and the order they are listed in a well-appointed manuscript a general outline could be roughly recognized in many other versions, even if in a shorter shape. Their structure may be described as follow. First the descriptions of wild beasts (lion, tiger, panther, pard, unicorn, lynx and so on) are presented; then those of tame animals (dog, sheep, ass, horse, cat and so on), of birds (starting with the eagle and ending probably with the bee) and finally of reptiles, fish and seldom of trees and men. The latter sections are never accompanied by pictures.[54]

The brief account of bestiaries presented hereafter includes some of the most important Latin versions in circulation in England and exemplifies the standard organization traced above.

The *Aberdeen Bestiary* (Aberdeen University Library, MS 24), written and illuminated in England around 1200, is a valuable example of its type. It contains notes and other evidence of the way it was designed and compiled.[55] The manuscript

[53] Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries*, pp. 9-10.
[54] Montague, "The Bestiary" in *Eton College Natural History Society Annual Report,* p. 5.
[55] All mentions, text and translation included, of this bestiary are taken from Colin McLaren & Aberdeen University Library in *http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary*, Dicember 2011.

begins with the first verses of Genesis "In principio creavit deus celum [*sic*] et terram"[56], where God created heaven, the earth and every living creature – beasts, cattle, creeping things – and finally man, male and female, to reign over all the other creatures. Then, after Adam named all living things according to their function in nature, the book of beasts starts with the "Incipit liber de naturis bestiarum. De leonibus et pardis et tigribus, lupis et vulpibus, canibus et simiis".[57]

The manuscript deals with approximately a hundred beasts which appear in this order: quadrupeds, at first wild beasts (the lion, "the mightiest" of them, the tiger, the ibex, the fox, etc.) then cattle and tame beasts (the sheep, the horse, the dog, the mice, etc.), birds (the dove, the pelican, the cock, the swallow, etc.), snakes (the viper, the asp, the lizard, etc.), worms and fish (the whale, the dolphins, etc.). The last sections deal with trees, men ("Isidore on the nature of man", "Isidore on the parts of man's body", "of the age of the man") and finally stones. As well as real animals, imaginary animals, like the monoceros, the leucrota, the phoenix, the sirens, etc. are also presented.

The *Cambridge Bestiary* (Cambridge University Library, MS Ii. 4.26) is a manuscript of the early thirteenth century and its leading source seems to be the *Physiologus* itself. However, it comprises reduced excerpts of the latter and is characterized by a largely changed vocabulary.[58] The first five plates are painted with rich colours whereas all the others are drawings in sepia. The arrangement of the animals is: wild beasts and quadrupeds (the lion, the tiger, the pard, the wether, the lamb, etc.), birds (the eagle, the vulture, the parrot, etc.), snakes (the dragon, the

[56] "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

[57] "Here begins the book of the nature of beasts. Of lions, panthers and tigers, wolves and foxes, dogs and apes."

[58] All mentions of this bestiary are taken from *Il Bestiario di Cambridge*, introduced by Francesco Zambon, presented by Umberto Eco, Parma - Milano: Ricci, 1974.

basilisk, the viper, etc.), worms (the worm, the spider, the millipede, the scorpion, etc.), fish (the cetacean, the whale, the dolphins, the swordfish, etc.) and finally trees.

MS Bodley 764, dating back to the mid-thirteenth century, has been preserved in the Bodleian Library of Oxford since the early seventeenth century.[59] It is a perfect example of the fine and charming work of a master artist, recognizable by its lively and richly ornamented illustrations, among which are some of the best bestiary paintings to be found to date. It consists of 137 folios and 135 miniatures. The preface presents Adam, the first man, in the act of giving all creatures their identification, naming each by name in Hebrew. Quadrupeds, which go on four feet, are wild beasts, domestic animals, cattle – suitable for food, for burden or for arms. The lion, the king of beasts, is the first of more than one hundred items that constitute the manuscript, presented in sequence without classification in sections. Likewise their order reflects more or less the same succession: wild beasts[60] "possess their natural freedom and act as they themselves have willed. [...] where their instinct leads them, there they go"[61] (the tiger, the panther, the beaver, the ape, the fox, etc.), tame animals and cattle[62] (the dog, the sheep, the buffalo, the cow, the mule, etc.), birds[63] (the eagle, the barnacle, the crane, the parrot, etc.), reptiles[64] (the basilisk, the asp, the idrus, the boas, the lizard, etc.), worm and fish[65] (the whale, the serra and the dolphin).

[59] All mentions of this bestiary are taken from *Bestiary*, translated and introduced by Richard Barber, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1993.
[60] Barber, pp. 21-70.
[61] Barber, p. 23.
[62] Barber, pp. 71-117.
[63] Barber, pp. 118-180.
[64] Barber, pp. 181-198.
[65] Barber, pp. 199-205.

The *Peterborough Bestiary* (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 53) dates from c. 1315 and is the most sumptuously decorated.[66] The wonder of this bestiary lies in the quality of its images and its finely ornate and rich decoration: 104 vivid miniatures are set on rectangular frames on golden or coloured grounds, 108 richly decorated initials extending over three lines of the text precede the individual chapter on each animal. Both have the same rich range of colours and are adorned with small drawings of stylized leaves, flowers and other drolleries. The description of more than one hundred animals begins with the lion, which comes immediately after a short introduction of Isidore on the wild beasts. The tiger, the pard, the leopard, the panther, the lynx, the griffin, the elephant and so on, are followed by the preface of Isidore dedicated to the tame beasts (the sheep, the lamb, the goat, the wild boar etc.) and the beast of burden (the steer, the ox, the camel, the dromedary, the ass, the onager, the horse, etc.). Then the "small animals" (so called in the *Etymologiae*) are the cat, the mouse, the weasel, the mole and so on, ending with the ant. The subsequent sequences describe birds and reptiles always introduced by Isidore. The last section is about fish and ends with an observation by Isidore, according to whom 144 different species of fish live in the sea.

As previously noted, the only manuscript in English is the *Middle English Bestiary* (British Library, Arundel MS 292).[67] Some linguistic features suggest that it was composed in the East Midlands in the first half of the thirteenth century. It has been preserved in the British Library since 1831, but it comes from the library of the Benedictine cathedral of Holy Trinity of Norwich. This text has sometimes been

[66] All mentions of this bestiary are taken from *Il Bestiario di Peterborough*, introduced by Lucy Freeman Sandler, transcription of the Latin text by Christopher De Hamel, translation of the Latin text by Valerio Marucci, Roma: Salerno, 2004.

[67] All mentions of this bestiary are taken from *Il Bestiario Medio Inglese*, edited by Dora Faraci, L'Aquila – Roma: Japadre Editore, 1990.

considered by the critics almost lacking in artistic worth and originality, being a mere translation of the *Theobaldus-Physiologus*. In the Middle Ages translation was not only the transfer of the contents from one language to another, but also a free adaptation, sometimes reduced, sometimes expanded of a text. The translation had to be suitable to the use required in that moment. Indeed, in our case it helped to educate and show moral principles. The pedagogic purpose of these texts coincided with their oral nature. Indeed, in the introduction the author sets a conversational relationship with his audience; he speaks directly to it. The rhetorical interrogations are all signs of his will to get in touch with the medieval listeners thus making his educational message more convincing. The animals of this manuscript are only thirteen and exactly in this order: the lion, the eagle, the snake, the ant, the stag, the fox, the spider, the whale, the siren, the elephant, the turtledove, the panther and the dove. In the text concerning each animal there is a clear separation between the two parts, the *natura* and the *significacio.*

1.4. The Animals

Scholars have generally showed interest for individual bestiary creatures and their significance also outside the bestiary context, beginning from Antiquity to the present way.[68]

It is worth making some preliminary remarks about the way I am going to proceed with this study. In this section the five animals – the cock, the fox, the wolf, the sheep and the lion I will examine in Henryson's *Fables* – are analyzed in the bestiary context, and particularly in the five manuscripts previously proposed in a short presentation. The sheep and the lamb, which I will analyze together in the

[68] Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries*, p. 2.

fables section, here are in distinct sections, as they are considered in the bestiary text. Every physical feature and behaviour of each animal will be considered together with the various meanings (*significacio*) they take as examples and rules for the edification of man. The reference text will be the MS Bodley 764, in the translation of Richard Barber. The four texts will be constantly compared to the latter to point out, above all, the information they add to those of the reference book. All the animals of the *Fables* appear in the mentioned bestiaries, except for the *Middle English Bestiary*, which deals with only two of the animals that will be considered hereafter, that is to say the lion and the fox.

The descriptive style I will use in the subsequent animals' description is the same used in the mentioned manuscripts: terse and clear explanations without frills and prolixity. I presume that this kind of style is typical of also many other medieval bestiaries. Probably, it was the right formulation for this type of text, which aimed to be merely guidelines to be followed by preachers and spiritual leaders in their oral teaching of religious, moral and educational precepts.

1.4.1. The Lion

The lion appears in all the manuscripts considered here and, moreover, it starts the sequence of the animals in each text. Perhaps its status gives it a place of honour in the bestiary "family", seeing that it is generally recognized as the king of beasts. The name "lion" is of Greek origin and its Latin version is '*leo*'.

It is the strongest among all animals. Those animals which could escape it thanks to their speed, are so frightened by its presence that they are unable to run away. The lion fears nothing, but there are some exceptions. Reasonably, it can do nothing against the tiny sting of the scorpion, snake's poison and fire, which the lion

fears more than anything else. However, its fear of the rumbling sound of wheels, and of cocks (especially white cocks) is inexplicable and the reasons are not explained in the texts. There are also small creatures called leontophones or 'lion-killers'[69]; their ashes have the power to kill the lion that eats them. Hence, for this reason leontophones are lion's natural enemies and it hates them so much that when it finds them it tramples them under its paws.

The lion is described as having different features. Short lions with a curly mane are described as peaceful, whereas the taller ones with a smooth mane are considered fierce. It is proud by nature and it does not live with other kinds of beasts – just like a king who lives apart from the masses. An old lion is recognisable by the lack of teeth. A sick lion looks for an ape and devours it in order to be cured. Lions mate face to face. When the lioness gives birth for the first time, it bears five cubs. Their number is reduced by one at a time in the following years, until the lioness gives birth to only one cub and then it becomes sterile forever.

These traits of the lion, more or less detailed, are the main features presented in all the manuscripts, except for the *Middle English Bestiary*, that instead focuses exclusively on the three main characteristics that naturalists attribute to the lion with the intention of handing on Christian messages. The three "naturae" are therefore common to all texts. First of all, it loves to roam about the mountain peaks, but when it smells the scent of the hunter (that comes in search of it) it wipes out its tracks with its tail so the hunter cannot find it and its lair. The second feature is that, when it sleeps, it seems to have its eyes open. The third is that when the lioness gives birth to

[69] Barber, p. 26.

its cubs, they are dead. It watches over them for three days until the lion comes and breathes on them and brings them to life.

Now, while the former list of properties, more or less truthful, are aimed at describing each animal in general terms, the latter three are shaped so as to provide metaphors of glorious events and important precepts of the Christian doctrine. Thus, in the first case, the mountain peak is the Kingdom of Heaven. Furthermore, like the lion, Jesus Christ ("the spiritual king of the tribe of Judah, the root of Jesse, the son of David"[70]), sent by the Father, hides from the devil – the sharp hunter – the tracks of his descent, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, to redeem lost mankind. Moreover the lion seems to have its eyes open even when it sleeps, like Christ, whose body fell asleep on the Cross, while his divine nature remained awake. Finally in the third characteristic, the breath of the lion on its cubs to awake them to life is the hand of God who awoke his Son, Christ, from the dead on the third day.

1.4.2. The Fox

The fox is a beast that never runs following a straight direction, but always does so in a tortuous way. Its Latin name *vulpes* may come from *volupia*, the goddess of pleasure. The link could be explained with the fox's features of movable and fickle beast. Indeed, it is a cunning and cheating animal. When it is hungry and does not find anything to eat it devises an ingenious plan: it rolls itself in red earth so as to look stained with blood and lies on the ground, holding its breath and pretending to be dead. Seeing it still, bloodstained and with its tongue out, birds think that it is dead and fly down to feed off its carrion. The fox, then, immediately catches and devours them. The nature of the fox is like that of the devil who deceives man (the

[70] Barber, p. 24.

birds) with the temptation of gluttony to punish their soul with eternal damnation, casting sinners to hell. However, the devil has no power on men who live according to faith.

The fox is dealt with roughly in the same way by all manuscripts, but the version of the *Middle English Bestiary* is a little different. The way the fox runs does not feature in this text; the bailiffs hate the fox for its bad deeds (it catches the cock, the capon, the goose and in its beak carries them into its lair); for its trick it sinks in a furrow of the ground and there lies for almost all the day, to deceive the birds; finally the crow is named among the birds that fly down on the fox.

1.4.3. The Wolf

The Latin noun *lupus* has two variants in Greek: the first, *likos,* derives from the Greek word for 'bites', because the wolf kills rapaciously whatever it finds; the second, *leopos*, means lion–footed, because like the lion its strength lies in its paws. The wolf is a wild beast thirsting for blood. Its main feature is savagery and for this reason prostitutes are also known as "she-wolves because they destroy the wealth of their lovers". [71]

The wolf doubtlessly represents the devil and its behaviour and characteristics must be considered from this point of view. The she–wolf bears cubs only in May and when it thunders, meaning that the devil fell from heaven at the first display of his pride. It does not catch food for its cubs near the lair and if it has to catch prey by night, it moves upwind like a sheepdog closer to the sheepfold so that the dogs cannot smell its scent and wake the shepherds. Thus the devil who feeds his followers with earthly delights continually goes around the sheepfold of the church's

[71] Barber, p. 69.

believers, to corrupt them and destroy their soul. Its eyes shine in the night like lamps because the works of the devil seem beautiful to blind and stupid men. Its strength lies in its chest and jaws (forequarters) not in its legs (hindquarters). This reminds us that the devil was first an angel of heaven and then turned apostate. The fact that it cannot turn its neck without turning the rest of its body, means that the devil does never deny his sins through penance.

Its nature is such that if it sees a man first, it can deprive him of his voice and looks down on him aware of being the winner. When man sees it first, then the wolf loses its fierceness and cannot run away. The only thing man can do once he is made voiceless by the wolf is to take off his clothes and trample on them, then take two stones in his hands and beat one against the other. That way, the wolf will lose its boldness and runs away, leaving man free. This can be understood in spiritual terms as an allegory. The wolf is the devil, the man is the sinner and the stones are the prophets, the saints or God himself, which are all called by the prophet 'stones of adamant' (Ezekiel, 3:9). [72] When the sinners are under the power of the devil he loses the ability to call for help, for he remains unheard by God, the saints and the prophets. At which point man, deprived of his old deeds (clothes) takes the stones and beats them to ask with his prayers for the mercy and the pardon of God. This "solution" is missing in the section of the wolf in M.S. Bodley 764.

The *Middle English Bestiary* does not deal with the nature of the wolf and of the following beasts.

[72] Quoted in the Aberdeen Bestiary (Aberdeen University Library MS 24), Colin McLaren & Aberdeen University Library, in *http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary*, February 2012.

1.4.4. The Cock

The cock, *gallus*[73], gets its name because it is sometimes castrated. Indeed, it is the only bird whose testicles are cut off. For this reason the ancient called castrated men cockerels.[74] The crowing of the cock at night has many positive consequences on man's life. It is a pleasant and useful sound because, like a good partner, it wakes the sleeper, encourages the worried, comforts the wanderer marking the progress of the night. When it crows with its melodious voice, the robber gives up thefts, the morning star rises and lights the sky, the sailor no longer fears seeing the storm dyeing, the devotee raises his voice in prayer. Its crow holds out hopes to the ill, eases the troubles of the sick, soothes the pains and brings faith back to those who have lost it.

When the cock crew thrice, Peter – "the rock of the Church"[75] – had the consciousness of his guilt denying Christ before cock-crow. As Christ himself, who turns towards those who stray and emends the sinners, the cock-crow brings the wanderer on the true path and offers comfort to the lost souls.

1.4.5. The sheep

The sheep gets its Latin name *ovis* from oblations, the first sacrificial ceremonies in which sheep, and not bulls, were offered to the divinities. It is a meek and harmless animal with a downy coat ("The sheep is a soft animal with wool"[76]). It is placid by nature. Some of them are called 'bidents'[77], because of their two upper teeth being more prominent then the other eight ones. They were preferred by pagans

[73] "Of the cock" in Aberdeen Bestiary (Aberdeen University Library MS 24), Colin McLaren & Aberdeen University Library, in *http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary,* February 2012.
[74] Barber, p. 172.
[75] Barber, p. 173 and *Il Bestiario di Peterborough*, p. 67.
[76] Barber, p. 77.
[77] "Of the sheep" in Aberdeen Bestiary (Aberdeen University Library MS 24), Colin McLaren & Aberdeen University Library, in *http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary,* February 2012.

in the sacrifices. At the beginning of winter sheep become insatiable and devour grass voraciously, to stuff themselves before the rigour of winter destroys the grass.

The virtues of the sheep are mentioned only in MS Bodley 764.[78] The sheep is the symbol of purity and represents the simple person, like the Lord himself. Like the sheep, He is clement, patient and balanced. Thus Isaiah, speaking of His death, says:

> He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.
>
> Isaiah 53:7

1.4.6. The lamb

Its Latin name *agnus* may come from the Greek word for pious, that is the sign of its natural goodness (this origin is missing only in the Peterborough Bestiary). Alternatively, *agnus* may derive from *agnosco*, because it recognizes, among all the other animals of the flock, its mother's bleating and reaches it straightway to suckle its milk. Likewise, its mother recognizes it among many similar-looking and sounding and takes care of its lamb only with motherly love.

MS Bodley 764 is the only bestiary which gives a religious interpretation to this animal. According to this text, the lamb is the symbol of Jesus Christ, an innocent lamb sacrificed with his death for mankind's salvation. However, the lamb is also the symbol of every believer who listens to the church's voice (the mother) and follows its commandments in a blameless life.

[78] Barber, p. 78.

2. The Fables

2.1. Aesop's Fables

The story of the Greek slave Aesop, who eventually became a free man, survived through the Middle Ages. Among the extant exemplars of the canonical texts studied in late medieval schools there is a Latin manuscript representing the evidence that Aesop's fables were well-known in the Middle Ages. The text is known as elegiac Romulus, a collection of Latin fables in elegiac verse, and in its introduction the legendary Roman emperor Romulus himself asserts he is translating the work of Aesop.[79]

The Greek historian Herodotus first mentions Aesop; his writings refer to "Aesop the fable writer", who was a slave in Ancient Greece during the sixth century BC.[80] That was the thin thread of history that could give Aesop a real life. He is also mentioned by Aristotle, Aristophanes, Athenaeus, Plato, Callimachus, Lucian, Philostratus, Pliny, Plutarch, Seneca, Strabo, and Zenobius. Furthermore, in his last days Socrates versified Aesop.[81]

However, little or nothing is known for certain about Aesop's life. His place of birth is uncertain (Thrace, Phrygia, Lydia, Samos, etc.). The legend tells he was born a slave and was set free by his last master as a reward for his learning and wit. Subsequently he lived at the court of King Croesus, where he was involved in public affairs and did a lot of travelling, finally meeting his death, thrown over a cliff at

[79] Edward Wheatley, *Mastering Aesop: Medieval Education, Chaucer, and his Followers*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000, p. vii.

[80] *Le Favole di Esopo*, edited by Enzo Mandruzzato and Giorgio Bernardi Perini, Venezia: Neri Pozza Editore, 1962, pp. 9-10.

[81] "Aesop's Life and Legend" in the web site of "Wise Animals: Aesop and his Followers" An Exhibition at the Rare Book & Manuscript Library, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, curated by Willis Goth Regier, Director of the University of Illinois Press, 20 January through 6 April, 2012 *http://www.library.illinois.edu/rbx/exhibitions/Aesop/aesop-life.html*, April 2012.

Delphi.[82] He was also said to be born with several physical deformities and shortcomings. This is what comes out of the many legends flourishing around the troubled life of the fable writer and what came together in the adventurous "Life of Aesop", written in the East in the earliest centuries of the Roman Empire and put together at the beginning of the fourteenth century by Maximus Planudes (c. 1260 - c. 1305), a monk of Constantinople. The *Life* is considered a Greek romance or legend and it is a masterpiece of lucky deeds. Latin translations of Planudes's *Life* circulated in Europe in the fifteenth century and German, French, English translations soon followed. When printing spread across Europe in the fifteenth century, the first ancient Greek works to be printed were Aesop and Planudes's *Life.*[83]

Aesop's reputation derived from his ability at telling fables which generally represent thinking and talking animals. He used the deeds of animals to explain, often caustically, his clever points of view on human nature. "Le favole animalesche riguardano unicamente gli uomini"[84], is the statement of Concetto Marchesi which explains the fable's intent quite effectively. The acting of the beasts highlights exclusively positive or negative inclination of mankind. The overlap of the human and animal worlds is due in particular to the speaking parts of the beast. This does not imply the transfer of the traits between the worlds: indeed, humanized animals are not an attempt to show bestial elements in human beings and less anthropomorphic qualities in animals.[85] Through the brief and simple narrative where

[82] *Le Favole di Esopo*, p. 11.

[83] "Aesop's Life and Legend" in *http://www.library.illinois.edu/rbx/exhibitions/Aesop/aesop-life.html*, April 2012.

[84] "The beast fables concern exclusively mankind", Concetto Marchesi in "Giudizi criciti e testimonianze" in *Le Favole di Esopo*, p. 29.

[85] Jill Mann, "How Animals Mean", in *From Aesop to Reynard: Best Literature in Medieval*

animals are endowed with human characteristics but lack human complexity, Aesop tried to make his contemporaries aware of some moral truths and instructive considerations about human relations. He was a sort of popular philosopher endowed with sharp tongue.[86]

The first sentence of the *Life* is "The Life and History of Aesop is involved, like that of Homer, the most famous of Greek poets, in much obscurity".[87] Aesop can be set near Homer; indeed, the two Greek figures share literary anonymity and seem to represent the basis of Hellenism, developing two different literary genres.[88] Homer is revered as the greatest ancient Greek epic poet. His classic epics (the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*) are generally seen as the culmination of many generations of oral story-telling, obviously in the noble form of poetic composition. In the few details available about him, he was said to be a court singer and a story teller.[89] Aesop was also a story teller. However, probably due to his slave status, his fables are organized in a popular and humble form, they represent losers, suffering and modest people, quite the opposite of the mythological heroes. Homer is the poet of the heroes, each of his characters has a name. Conversely, in Aesop only the deities have a name, men are anonymous and the other characters, mainly animals, act as if they were individual representatives of all races (the fox, the lion, the wolf, etc.). Characterization is banished, therefore they do not impersonate a character but only a strict, fix and impersonal role, which plays the quick sequence of the fable, without emotional participation with the other characters. The reader itself is not involved in

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Britain, Oxford: University Press, 2009, p. 31.

[86] "Premessa a Esopo" in *Le Favole di Esopo*, p. 11.

[87] *Aesop's Fables*, translated by George Fyler Townsend, Seattle: The World Wide School, 1997, in *http://www.worldwideschool.org*, April 2012.

[88] "Introduzione" in *Esopo Favole*, introduced by Giorgio Manganelli, translated by Elena Ceva Valla, Milano: Rizzoli, 1951, pp. 5-6 .

[89] Homer in *http://www.ancientgreece.com,* April 2012.

emotional states.[90]

Each tale is short, just a few sentences long, and has a concise frame. There are few and generic elements that contextualize the situation or the event, such as time and place information. Another eloquent definition is "Ma sono diverse dalle storie perché le storie raccontano cose che accadono, se mai, una volta sola; le favole raccontano cose che accadono sempre."[91] Indeed, the beast fable is a short stream of actions that aims to provide a general lesson for life. Everyday concrete details (temporal context and location) are purposely left out to provide a model of behaviour which has the same outcome each time it occurs: a timeless lesson and a moral generalization condensed in the few words of the ending. By working in the exact opposite way of epic and tragedy, the fable reduces the world scale, disregards space and time and subverts the extreme conditions, which are usually emphasized in the mentioned genres, in even tone and with hardly mentioned feelings.[92] The simplicity and the essentiality of the Aesopic world are the literary rules with which the genre, "beast fable", identifies. Also the neat structural frame is another typical element of the strict stylistic boundary of the beast fable.[93]

In the tale of "The Lion and the Mouse", a mouse, caught by a lion, begs him to spare its life, with the promise that one day it will repay the favour. The lion laughs at the idea but sets the mouse free. One day the lion is caught in a net. The mouse hears the lion's roaring and comes to help it. It cuts the net with its teeth freeing the lion. The moral lesson is: even the weak and small ones may be of help to

[90] "Introduzione" in *Esopo Favole*, p. 7.

[91] "but they are different from the tales because the tales are about things that happen, if necessary, only once; the fables are about things that always happen." Marchesi in "Giudizi critici e testimonianze" in *Le Favole di Esopo*, p. 29.

[92] *Esopo Favole*, p. 8.

[93] *Esopo Favole*, pp. 8-9.

those mightier than them.

The tale of "The Fox and the Grapes" is about an hungry fox which tries to reach some grapes hanging high from a vineyard. After several attempts the fox gives up, claiming that the grapes are surely too sour to eat. Moral: sometimes when we cannot get what we want, we pretend that it is not worth having.

In the tale of "The Hare and the Tortoise" an hare laughs at the tortoise's slowness. Therefore, they have a race to see who is the fastest animal. Unsurprisingly, the hare runs very fast whereas the tortoise is slow. The hare immediately takes the lead and then rests under a tree and soon falls asleep. The tortoise, in the meantime, continues to plod on, slowly and steadily, eventually winning the race. The message of the tale is that success depends on actually using our talents, not just having them.

The reader is likely to be certainly familiar with at least one of these fables, perhaps a different version, more or less changed according to the context in which the fable was adapted. Nowadays this kind of fables is widely used in children's literature, usually accompanied with coloured illustrations about animals. The last one especially, "The Tortoise and the Hare", is one of the most famous and used in books for children and has been also animated by both Disney and Looney Tunes.

Historical tradition establishes the term 'Aesopic' rather than 'Aesop's'. The reason is that the Aesop's authorship of some or most of the classic fables is dubious. Furthermore, no surviving fable collection or single fable are old enough to be attributed to Aesop, who, if really existed, lived in the sixth century BC. Phaedrus himself, in his Prologue to Book IV, gives to his fables the attribute of 'Aesopic'

rather than 'Aesop's' since he has added new ones to the few of Aesop.[94] This effect is due to the collection in the "Aesop's book" of similar material, where fables of different origin, but written in the same particular standard, were gathered.[95]

Aesop may have been no more than a legendary figure, invented to provide an author for tales featuring speaking animals. These stories became synonymous with *fable*, an ideal place where traditions, legends, games and oracles from all over the world came together.[96] A lot of memorable examples became thus attached to Aesop's name. Thanks to later writers who collected them, these fables have become fundamental part of the heritage of Western literature and folklore.

The cultural roots of most Western fable studies can be found in the wisdom-literature of some populations of north Africa and the Middle East, notably in the fable heritage of ancient Egypt and of the Semitic, Persian and Indian traditions, under the influence of which the Greek fable may have developed. At the time of the Pharaohs, fables had a lively increase. The Greek and Roman fables with crocodiles, cats and beetles are hardly separable from the Egyptian tradition, in which these animals were deities. Moralizing examples showing analogies with the fables can also be found in the Bible. Furthermore, in the Assyro-Babylonian tradition, documentary evidence, particularly the "contrasts" (brief tales with a didactic and moralizing purpose in which animals and plants act), are present in interesting kinds of fables. However, the largest evidence of the fables can be traced in the Indo-European world. In this respect, the Sanskrit literature is rich in examples: in the *Mahābhārata* – one of the greatest epic poems of India and an important book of Hinduism – there are often references to fables; the collections of Indian fables

[94] Mann, "Introduction", p. 4.
[95] *Esopo Favole*, p. 9.
[96] *Esopo Favole*, p. 10.

Jātakas and *Pañchatantra* give the most famous evidence. The former is a collection of moral stories about the lives of the Buddha, in both human and animal form, prior his final birth in the 'Enlightened' guise. The *Pañchatantra* or *Kalila and Dimma* is a tale collection whose self-proclaimed purpose is to educate the sons of royalty. The characters are animals which symbolize different human behaviour and give advice on matters of everyday life. It was translated into many languages and the source of most the surviving versions is the eighth-century Arabic translation of 'Abdallah ibn-al-Muqaffa'.[97]

The two texts were compiled, in their current form, between the fourth and fifth centuries AD. It is believed that even then the stories were already ancient. The fables of these two collections found their way to Europe and to the western tradition through oral folklore channels and by way of Persian and Arabic translations, influencing medieval fable writers.

The first extensive translation of Aesop into Latin was done in Rome by Phaedrus in the first half of the first century AD. Phaedrus declares in the first line of his work "Aesopus auctor quam materiam repperit, Hanc ergo pulivi versibus senariis" (I, Prol. 1-2).[98] His putative source is Aesop but he introduces something of his own, remaining however true to the spirit of Aesop.[99] Though his actual source is unknown, Phaedrus's collection undoubtedly laid the basis of medieval beast fable tradition. His fables have a practical use, which they have never lost, that is to counsel or to caution against some facts within the context of a specific historical

[97] Mann, "Introduction", p. 21.

[98] "Aesop is my source. He invented the substance of these fables, but I have put them into finished form in senarian verse" Perry's translation in Mann, "Introduction", p. 3.

[99] "Equidem omni cura morem servabo senis;/ Sed si libuerit aliquid interponere,/ … Bonas in partes, lector, accipias velim": II, Prol. 8-11 ("I shall indeed take every care to preserve the spirito f the famous old man; but if I choose to insert something of my own … I would have you, Reader, take it in good part") Perry's translation in Mann, "Introduction", p. 3.

event. The persuasive function of the fable was the reason of its efficacious use in public oratory, as attested in examples found in ancient literature.[100]

After the fall of the Roman Empire public oratory declined, however the fable maintained its persuading mission. In the course of history, and specifically in the Middle Ages, the everyday use of the fable in social and politic life remained steady. However, it also played an important role in elementary education. This practice was followed in Greek and Roman education. For example; in the first century AD Quintilian in "The Orator's Education" suggested Aesopic fables for school exercises.[101] In the Middle Ages beast fables were the preferred choice in pedagogical practice. They were among the first texts read by students of Latin. The simple and clear narrative was suitable for beginners, while the charming story and moral wisdom made them appealing to the young. The elegiac verse of Avianus[102] well suited school texts and the original version of the collection circulated during the Middle Ages. Phaedrus's fables were written in senarian verse, a difficult and unusual metre, and they need to be recast into prose. After the tenth century Phaedrus was not longer copied because the prose version known as the *Romulus* superseded his original version.

2.2. The elegiac Romulus

Biographical information about Aesop, the father of the *fable*, was to remain incomplete at least until printing began to spread. An early fourteenth-century *Life of Aesop* was supposedly imported into Europe from Byzantium. This represents a unified narrative of the fragments of Aesop's biography strewn in a indefinite

[100] On the examples of Aristotle and Livy see Mann, "Intoduction", p. 5.
[101] Mann, "Introduction", p. 6.
[102] A Latin writer of fables, generally placed in the fourth century AD. In *http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia,* September 2012.

number of texts written or available in the earlier Middle Ages.[103]

In the second half of the fifteenth century – when printing spread across Europe – the *elegiac Romulus* was printed at least in France, Italy, German and the Netherlands. It appeared in England only in 1502, printed at the press of Richard Pynson and the following year in the printing works of Wynkyn de Worde – William Caxton's successor. Normally, scholastic commentaries to the fables and vocabulary glosses were added to these printings, which suggest the scholastic use of the text.[104] The popularity of the *elegiac Romulus* must be attributed to its presence among the canonical texts studied in medieval grammar schools.

The curricular text, based upon an earlier Romulus review, was in all probability written in the late twelfth century. For any educated person from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century 'Aesop' would most probably have meant the *elegiac Romulus*. Its remarkably stable contents over these centuries explain its widespread circulation: before 1500 it appeared in at least fifty editions and printings from five different countries. The collection, consisting of sixty elegiac verse fables, has been discussed under several titles: *elegiac Romulus*, the *Anonymus Neveleti*, for the sixteenth-century editor Isaac Nevelet, the fables of Gualterus Anglicus (Walter the Englishman) and the *Aesopus moralizatus*.[105] The fables in this collection are not different from the modern concept of the fable. Some of those appearing in Book I of *elegiac Romulus* are still considered the most generally representative of the genre.

> Id ego Romulus transtuli de graeco (sermon) in latinum. Si autem legeris, Tiberine fili, et pleno animo advertas, invenies apposita ioca, quae tibi multiplicent risum et acuant satis ingenium.[106]

[103] Wheatley, "Figuring the Fable and Its Father", p. 18.
[104] Wheatley, "Figuring the Fable and Its Father", p. 19.
[105] Wheatley, "Introduction", p. 3.
[106] Wheatley, "I, Romulus, have translated these from Greek language into Latin. If you read them, Tiberinus my son, and turn toward them whole-heartedly, you will discover appropriate jets that will increase your laugher and duly sharpen your character." p. 64.

In the opening epistle of the *elegiac Romulus*, 'Romulus' explains that he has translated the fables from Greek to Latin so that his son, 'Tiberinus', may derive from them both pleasure and education.[107] Little did it matter whether 'Romulus' was really the Roman emperor, or whether just an old sage who addressed 'Tiberinus', his son or a young person, his literary work or whether they actually existed. The opening epistle is a traditional example of wise advice and warnings addressed to a young person by an older one whose purpose is to educate whilst providing pleasure.

The *elegiac Romulus* was intended for a school audience and extant manuscripts and incunabula bear witness of many pedagogical and interpretative practices associated with it, both the rudiments of language acquisition (Latin) and techniques of elaboration and allegorical interpretation of the text. The medieval church was the keeper of Latin tradition, therefore the teaching and learning of fable texts and authorized methods of interpretation were its exclusive province. The clerical culture aimed to preserve its normative body of knowledge so as to maintain its predominant cultural role and, by using its political power, continually reinforce the principal role of Latin in the educational and learning processes.[108]

Meanwhile the beast fables were also used in the preaching tradition. For instance, they were included in the Latin sermon practice. Two thirteenth-century ecclesiastics, the English cleric Odo of Cheriton and the French Jacques de Vitry, included fables in their sermons. Odo also composed a collection of beast fables, *Fabulae*, which preachers used as a handbook. Many of his interpretations replace the simple moralizing traits of Aesopic fables with their allegorical meaning, closer to the bestiary tradition. He uses these interpretations to reveal the negative aspects

[107] Mann, "Introduction", p. 7.
[108] Wheatley, "Toward a Grammar of Fable Reading in Its Pedagogical Context", pp. 52-53.

of his contemporary society, just as the Scottish poet Robert Henryson did in the fifteenth century.[109]

For over two centuries the canonical fable collection helped to develop a linguistic practice in educated people. Moreover, this standard body of pedagogical and interpretative approaches preceded the composition of the *elegiac Romulus*. Indeed its author was educated through the grammatical precepts common in the twelfth century and when, in the thirteenth century, his fable collection replaced the fables of Avianus (eleventh and twelfth centuries) as grammar-school curriculum, he included most of these precepts into his work. The *elegiac Romulus* was one of the earliest texts purposely written for the medieval grammar-school curriculum and incidentally proved to be a more appropriate text for teaching than Avianus' fables.[110] The extant 170 manuscripts of the *elegiac Romulus* represent only a small number of the copies in circulation in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. As well as these copies, there are papers and parchments on which students copied or wrote down the fables the teachers dictated. Only a few examples of these products have survived.

Nowadays fables are to be found almost exclusively in children's literature. However, modern readers have to imagine the Middle Ages as an era during which fables were meant to be read and told for ethical edification and as an important vehicle for educational, religious and social communication, as shown by their various uses. Thus, the medieval need for literature with ethical content opened the possibility for fable to be read seriously.

The widespread circulation of the Latin *elegiac Romulus* collection preceded

[109] Mann, "Introduction", pp. 14-15.
[110] Wheatley, "Toward a Grammar of Fable Reading in Its Pedagogical Context", pp. 54-55.

the similar popularity of another Aesopic collection, written in vernacular languages. This version was compiled by Heinrich Steinhöwel and it was first published in a bilingual Latin-German by Johann Zainer in Ulm in 1476-77edition. Prefaced by a *Life of Aesop*, it included various texts: most of the *elegiac Romulus*, the fables of Avianus, Greek fables translated by Rinuccio d'Arezzo, the *Disciplina Clericalis* of Petrus Alphonsus, and tales from Poggio Bracciolini's *Facetiae*. In the following fifty years translations and publication of Steinhöwel's work reached a large number of European countries in their vernacular language – in 1480 French, in 1484 English (William Caxton's translation), in 1485 Dutch, in 1488 Spanish and Czech, in 1489 Colognish, etc.[111]

The vernacular fables of medieval Britain – the Middle English fables of Geoffrey Chaucer and John Lydgate (*The Nun's Priest's Tale* and *Isopes Fabules*) and Robert Henryson's Middle Scots collection (*Morall Fabillis*) – are clearly descendants of the scholastic fable tradition, since their authors were former students of Latin fables and brought to their writings what they inherited from school texts. All of Lydgate's fables and most of Henryson's are translation of apologues from the *elegiac Romulus*.[112] In his *Morall Fabillis*, Henryson's main source was the twelfth-century Latin *elegiac Romulus* of Gualterus Anglicus.

2.3. Robert Henryson: a biography

Robert Henryson is a noteworthy poet of the late Middle Ages and one of the most important writers of fifteenth-century Scotland. Apart from his name and a distinct body of authoritative writings, very little is known about his life, which therefore presents a series of fascinating puzzles. There are many pieces of evidence

[111] Wheatley, "Figuring the Fable and Its Father", p. 19.
[112] Wheatley, "Preface", p. vii.

about late fourteenth century bearing the name of Robert Henryson. Indeed, the difficulty stands in the fact that Robert Henryson was an extremely common name.[113] Despite the difficulty of defining which facts concern his life, one of the most widely accepted events about Henryson's life is indicated in the Charteris edition (1569-1570) of the *Morall Fabillis.* On the title page he is described with the influential title of "Scholmaister of Dunfermeling".[114]

According to William Dunbar's "Lament of the Makars", he died before 1505. Indeed, listing the dead poets of Scotland, Dunbar says "In Dumfermelyne he has done roune/Whit Maister Robert Henrisoun" (ll. 81-82).[115] The place and date of publication of Dunbar's poem are both uncertain, but it was written just after the death of another poet, John Reid of Stobo, known for certain to be in 1505, as mentioned in the list of dead poets.[116]

In 1639 Sir Francis Kinaston printed a Latin translation of Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* where he included a story about Henryson suggesting that he was an old man at the time of his death. This confirms Henryson's own designation of himself in his verse as "ane man of age"[117] (the old narrator of the *Testament*, the figure of Aesop in the *Fables* and the old man in the short poems). It is impossible to date his birth exactly but the information allows us to place it sometime between 1420 and 1435.[118]

There has been a great deal of assumptions about Henryson's education and literary background. It is likely that he attended one of the Scottish grammar schools

[113] Denton Fox, ed. "Introduction" in *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981, p. xv.
[114] Robert L. Kindrick, *Robert Henryson*, Boston: Twayne, 1979, p. 15.
[115] Kindrick, p. 19.
[116] John MacQueen, "Introduction" in *Complete and Full with Numbers: The Narrative Poetry of Robert Henryson*, Amsterdam - New York: Rodopi, 2006, p. 10.
[117] Kindrick, p. 17.
[118] Kindrick, p. 19.

established before 1400. The curriculum that Henryson could have followed in such a school was probably the *trivium*, which included grammar, logic and rhetoric. He is therefore likely to have studied works like Aesop's fables, Horace's *Ars poetica,* Cicero's *De amicitia* and *De inventione* and Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria nova*.[119]

Which university he might have attended remains a doubtful matter. In Scotland there were two universities: the University of Glasgow, which was only founded in 1451, and the earlier Scottish university, St Andrews, founded in 1411. However, Henryson's name is not mentioned in the early record of St Andrews.[120] Due to the unstable relations between Scotland and England during the fifteenth century it is unlikely that he attended the University of Oxford or Cambridge. The alternative could be that he may have studied at a university in France, Italy or elsewhere. However, his poems provide rich information about his complete educational training, which would have followed all the steps of the medieval tradition in science and humanities: the already mentioned *trivium,* the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy), philosophy and lastly canon and civil law.[121] He probably studied Boccaccio's *Genealogia deorum*, Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, St Thomas's *Summa Theologica* and Hugh of St Victor's *Didascalicon*.[122] What is certain is that Henryson had a thorough knowledge of the Vulgate, for the *Morall Fabillis* are filled with biblical references.[123]

Important evidence shows that on 10 September 1462 he was incorporated in the recently founded University of Glasgow (1451) probably as a teacher of law. He

[119] Kindrick, p. 15.
[120] Fox, "Introduction", p. xvii.
[121] MacQueen, "Introduction", p. 9.
[122] Kindrick, p. 16.
[123] Fox, "Introduction", p. xxiii.

was described as licentiate first in arts and after, a higher degree, bachelor of Decreits (Canon Law).[124] There is proof in his poetry of his knowledge of law. Based on records extant from Dunfermline he witnessed on 18 and 19 March 1477-8 and 6 July 1478 three grants of land made by the Abbot of Dunfermline, Henry Crichton.[125] This indicates that Henryson was also involved in legal activities acting as a public notary. He was clearly an educated man who was fond of learning, most likely practicing a conjunct career in law and education. His interests, object of debate among critics, covered a wide range of different fields such as medicine, the flax industry, politics and social issues. There are no records about his marital status nor of any descendants he might have had.[126]

The available information about Henryson connects his life mainly with Dunfermline where he was certainly resident during the 1470s and 1480s (as demonstrated by grants made by Henry Crichton bearing his name). He may have moved there from Glasgow in 1468 at the call of Richard Bothwell who had acquaintances in Glasgow. Bothwell was the Abbot of Dunfermline (1444-70), the predecessor of Henry Crichton (1470-82), and probably gave the poet a house and land.[127] As a master of the abbey grammar school, Henryson probably held a position of some importance. He might have been a priest, but the information about it is not clear. More reliable information concerns the history of Dunfermline. The city prospered around a Benedictine monastery founded by St Margaret around 1074. The monastery was converted into the Abbey of the Holy Trinity in 1124 and a number of royal interments in the church suggest that it probably became one of the most

[124] MacQueen, "Introduction", p. 9.
[125] Fox, "Introduction", p. xiii.
[126] Kindrick, p. 16.
[127] MacQueen, "Introduction", p. 10.

important monastic establishments in Scotland. Meanwhile the city became a royal borough and later even a royal residence. During Henryson's life, under the reign of James III and James IV, the city underwent a flourishing development.[128]

2.4. Scotland in the fifteenth century

In the fifteenth century the Scottish population was about one-fifth of that of England. In spite of the lower number of inhabitants, in Scotland there were three university foundations which attracted a lot of students: St Andrews (1411), Glasgow (1451) and Aberdeen (1495). Furthermore, printing was introduced in 1507 by Walter Chepman and Androw Myllar[129], making a fundamental step for the development of fifteenth century Scottish culture.

"Although the fifteenth century in Scotland was a golden age of Scottish culture, it was also an age of transition, of political turmoil an civil war, of unscrupulous violence, and bloody treachery." The words of Marshall W. Stearns (*Robert Henryson,* New York, 1949) clearly sum up the turbulent climate of the fifteenth century society.[130] Political life was constantly precarious. Internal conflicts were the effects of the efforts of the Stuart monarchs to consolidate their power on the rebellious barons and on an increasingly stronger middle class. A great number of misfortunes undergone by the Scottish kings made their aspirations fail. James I was imprisoned in England and then assassinated by the hands of a group of Scottish conspirators; James II, who was crowned at the age of six (1437), died before he was thirty in an unhappy accident; finally James III, involved in baronial disputes and an English war, was captured by his own barons and then killed at Bannockburn.

[128] Kindrick, p. 16.
[129] Alexander Manson Kinghorn, "Introduction" in *The Middle Scots poets*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970, p. 2.
[130] Kindrick, p. 19.

The relations with the rest of the world were not any better. There were constant conflicts with England over questions of territorial boundaries and feudal supremacy which created economic and social struggles in Scotland. This disagreements forced the Scottish government to form alliances and to interact with nations on the Continent. The alliance with France was formed to combine forces against the common enemy, England, and gave positive educational and intellectual effects. Relations with the Italian states encouraged the Renaissance to be known into Scotland.

As in every Christian country during the Middle Ages, the church had an important role in the organization of Scottish society. At the beginning of the fifteenth century the church had already been weakened by the Great Schism. The internal arguments, the widespread corruption among its members and its involved in politics, were the further reasons of the weakness of church in general and of the Scottish one in the specific instance. It was damaged even more by attacks from the kings and the burgesses. The church was unable and often unwilling to make efficiently either its spiritual and social duties. This position induced the literary men of the time to express critical opinions about the church.[131]

Robert Henryson was born around the period of the death of King James I (1437) and died close to 1503, the year of the James IV's English marriage, an event which turned out to be fateful for Scotland. Henryson spent much of his life during the reign of James IV whose skill in international relations – he was able to establish peaceful relationship with England – gave peace to Scotland and allowed society to pursue cultural concerns.[132] However, Henryson's working life falls mostly within

[131] Kindrick, pp. 22-24.
[132] Kindrick, p. 22.

the unsettled reign of James III (1460-1488).[133] No doubt it was the Scotland of that troubled reign that most evidently influenced the Henryson we meet in his poems. Even if political and social polemic is not the substance of his work, the conditions of Scottish society with its political intrigue, internal dissension and clerical corruption certainly influenced Henryson's poetry. On several occasions his works seem to refer to the reign of James III and to comment on it. For instance, "The Taill of the Lyoun and the Mous" refers to the Lauder Bridge episode of 1482, when James was taken prisoner by members of the nobility and jailed for a period of time in Edinburgh Castle.[134] The opening of the fable appears like the conventional dream allegory, the use of which enables the author to make, cautiously, dangerous allusion to the weakness of the king and to the complot.[135] The word "Emperor" appears twice in important passages of his tales, exactly in the Moralities of "The Taill of the Sone and Air of the foirsaid Foxe, callit Father wer; Alswa the Parliament of fourfuttit Beistis, haldin be the Lyoun" and "The Taill of the Lyoun and the Mous", referring in both cases to the lion. However, the identification with the Holy Roman Emperor (Frederick III, 1452-1493) is not so obvious, whereas in 1469 James III had expressed imperial ambitions and in his last silver coin he is portrayed with the imperial crown. In Henryson the king of the beasts, the lion, is normally associated with the King of Scotland. The king of beasts in "The Taill of the Sone and Air of the foirsaid Foxe, callit Father wer; Alswa the Parliament of fourfuttit Beistis, haldin be the Lyoun" has to deal with potent enemies or rivals. Similarly, James III, throughout his reign, had strained relations with the nobilities and church dignitaries. In twenty years the internal conflicts of power between him and on the other side earls, dukes,

[133] MacQueen, "Introduction", p. 11.
[134] MacQueen, "Introduction", p. 11.
[135] Kurt Wittig, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature*, Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1978, p. 37.

barons, archbishops, bishops and abbots induced frequent aristocratic conspiracies against him; his death was the consequence of the last one.[136]

Henryson also criticized social abuses and the lack of justice, common causes of complaint during the reign of James III. Far from attempting to promulgate a specific political or social concept, he pointed out local social abuses, failure of justice and despised them, but always treated the king's court with respect.

2.5. Henryson's works

Little is known of his life and the chronology of his works also remains open to question. Henryson himself names the sources of his three major poems.[137] For the *Morall Fabillis* his source was the twelfth-century Latin *elegiac Romulus* of Gualterus Anglicus. Henryson himself would have taught Aesop's fables as exercises in rhetoric and composition when he was a schoolmaster. A political reference in some fables suggest to some scholar that they could have been composed in the late 1480s.

The *Testament of Cresseid* is a more mature work and its source is Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde.* In its prologue Henryson describes his narrator as "ane man of age".[138] This work is recognised as the finest poem to appear in the fifteenth century.

Orpheus and Eurydice is for many scholars a younger work and its source is Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*.

No surviving copy of any poem belongs to Henryson's lifetime.[139] But the innumerable prints of his works in the course of time demonstrate his great popularity.

[136] MacQueen, "Introduction", pp. 11-12.
[137] Fox, "Introduction", p. xii.
[138] Kindrick, p. 17.
[139] MacQueen, "Introduction", p. 13.

2.6. The Morall Fabillis

Robert Henryson's *Morall Fabillis* is a collection of thirteen fables and a general prologue. Each fable consists of a narrative relating to timeless values and contemporaneous activities and events, followed by a *Moralitas*, in which the poet explains its meaning. Indeed, Henryson's fables usually have a twofold moral: one, inside the tale, is humanitarian and social, while the other one, at the end, is the morality. The latter sometimes gives an opinion that disagrees with the consideration specified in the narrative part. Thus in the tale of "The Cock and the Jasp" the approval of the cock's disregard for the jewel it has found becomes in the morality a reason to represent the cock as an idiot disdaining science (the jewel). The cock embodies the human being that, amused with riches, has no constancy to seek the delight of learning.[140] The tradition of adding a moral to a tale was a long one. The *Gesta Romanorum*[141] is a clear example of the tendency to collect pagan tales and anecdotes to which are added moral convictions intended to help the reader or the listener understand the story in Christian terms.

The *Moralitas* is usually a moralist's advice on individual behaviour and a censure on certain conducts of the social and political institutions of Henryson's time: the church, the nobility, the king, etc. Not two of these fables have the same moral or political meaning. There is no doubt that the tales provide a broad perspective on fifteenth-century literary and social matters. The representation of social classes is widely used by Henryson in the *Morall Fabillis,* where the

[140] Wittig, p. 40.

[141] *Gesta Romanorum* is a late medieval collection of slightly over 200 stories in Latin. It was one of the most popular books of the time and the source, directly or indirectly, of many later authors, including Geoffrey Chaucer, John Gower, Giovanni Boccaccio, Thomas Hoccleve, William Shakespeare, etc. Of its authorship nothing certain is known, but its didactic nature and the allegorical explanations attached to the stories suggest that it was intended as a manual for preachers. It is likely that it was compiled in England. In *http://www.britannica.com,* September 2012.

characters symbolize all levels of Scottish society. This does not mean that they are folk tales merely derived from medieval sources. Indeed, Henryson reveals a high level of refinement in character development, plot structure and rhetorical polish. His realism in character portrayal is displayed in his acute observation of his fellow men who are recognizable in the animals' realistic features. Moreover, while normally in most fables the animals are simply human characters in disguise, in Henryson they are real animals: he watches them closely. They feel human emotions and have human behaviour, but they are not only symbols. Henryson observes both the human and the animal details.[142]

Henryson is usually careful to name his principal sources. In the Latin line in his prologue to the collection (line 28) he clearly indicates the use of *elegiac Romulus* as a source text. As a schoolmaster, probably he would be clearly familiar with this standard schoolbook. This collection of fables is the twelfth-century Latin verse *Romulus* of Gualterus Anglicus, who may be identifiable with the Walter who was chaplain to Henry II of England, tutor to William II of Sicily and later Archbishop of Palermo. If the identification is exact, the work may have been written about 1175.[143] It is a concise versification in elegiacs of fifty-eight fables from the first three books of the 'Romulus' collection. The usual length for an individual fable is some 20 lines. Henryson's longest fable, "The Preaching of the Swallow" has 329 lines, to which corresponds "De Hirundine et Avibus" with 18. Henryson's "The Two Mice" has 235 lines while its corresponding "De Mure rustico et urbano" has 36.[144] This shows that Henryson followed Gualterus, as Fox notes, albeit with significant freedom. Seven of Henryson's fables can also be found in Gualterus, but

[142] Wittig, pp. 39-40.
[143] Fox, "The Sources", p. xlv.
[144] MacQueen, "Introduction", p. 14.

Henryson was able to expand the abbreviated source material including Scottish settings and characterization. Therefore his versions are much richer than their Latin equivalent and also less constrained and simpler, allowing for a greater elegance and style.

Of Henryson's thirteen fables, seven have a counterpart in the *elegiac Romulus,* and, with the exception of XII (The Wolf and the Lamb), each contains an explicit reference to Aesop – at the beginning of the narrative or in the *Moralitas*. They are the following:[145]

I. The Cock and the Jasp (= *elegiac Romulus* I)

II. The Two Mice (= *elegiac Romulus* XII)

VI. The Sheep and the Dog (= *elegiac Romulus* IV)

VII. The Lion and the Mouse (= *elegiac Romulus* XVIII)

VIII. The Preaching of the Swallow (= *elegiac Romulus* XX)

XII. The Wolf and the Lamb (= *elegiac Romulus* II)

XIII. The Paddock and the Mouse (= *elegiac Romulus* III)[146]

Fable XI "The Wolf and the Wether", that begins with the same allusion to Aesop as those above, does not derive from the Romulus tradition, but it can be included in this group of Aesopic fables.

Interspersed with these Aesopic fables, there are five fables that belong more to the tradition of beast-epic, in which the central character is the sly fox, who outwits all the other animals and also the men. Its antagonist and constant victim is the stupid wolf. In this world the high authority is the lion, the king of the beasts, at whose court the animals sometimes assemble.

[145] Jill Mann, *From Aesop to Reynard: Beast Literature in Medieval Britain*, Oxford: University Press, 2009, p. 264.

[146] I use Denton Fox's titles as in Mann, p. 264.

III. The Cock and the Fox

IV. The Fox and the Wolf

V. The Trial of the Fox

IX. The Fox, the Wolf and the Cadger

X. The Fox, the Wolf and the Husbandman

These fables share similarities with the Reynardian tradition and therefore with the *Roman the Renart* and its derived versions. Between 1175 and 1250 the first forms of the *Roman the Renart* and the subsequent rewritings, modifications and translations, rival Aesop in both importance and complexity. Although its presence is attested in France and in other countries of Southern Europe, it is uncertain how well known the *Roman* was in Britain, at least before 1481, when Caxton published his translation from a Dutch version.[147] Caxton's *History of Reynard the Fox* could in theory have been known by Henryson as demonstrated in his Fables IV-V and IX-X. It seems quite certain also that Henryson's "The Cock and the Fox" is derived from Chaucer's "Nun's Priest's Tale". Henryson's literary debt to Chaucer is great and his long-standing designation as a "Scottish Chaucerian" is recognized. He is the first to acknowledge his debt in his direct references to *Troilus and Criseyde* in the prologue of the *Testament of Cresseid*.[148] It is no accident that this work was even mistaken in Thynne printing for another book of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. This does not mean that Henryson, in his works, imitates Chaucer. The comparison of "The Cock and the Fox" with Chaucer's "Nun's Priest's Tale" shows how he was able to condense a longer source even while adding new elements to the fable. With his talent he enriches Chaucer's heritage with his native Scots tradition strongly evident

[147] Fox, "The Sources", p. xlvii.
[148] Kindrick, p. 28.

in his work.[149] This makes him earn an independent place in literary history. To call Henryson's fables 'Reynardian' does not mean that their primary source is the *Roman de Renart*, but that they share features with the epic tradition. The first distinctive feature is the plot of the fables with the inevitable presence of the trickster-fox. Then the fox is always referred to by a personal name – the Scottish name Lowrence or Lowrie. Three of these fables (III-V) are linked into a narrative sequence similar to the *Roman de Renart*: Fable IV refers clearly to the same fox that appears in Fable III and, although it ends with its death, Fable V concerns its son, who, by bearing the same name as its father, seems to give a prosecution to the trickster-fox's tradition.[150] The narrative of these fables, by linguistic elaboration and clever verbal play, also presents the typical comic exuberance of the *Roman de Renart*. These characteristics are also common to Henryson's Aesopic fables, which, owing to these peculiarities, differ remarkably from the classic Aesopic tradition.

The narrative of all thirteen fables reaches a great degree of elaboration with real and charming details, seasonal descriptions (due to Henryson's intense power of visualisation), rich dialogues which point out the different tones of human speech and a fair range of rhetorical artifices. The plentiful dialogues of Henryson's animals enrich the simple outline of the action, typical of the beast fable. Their dialogue sections offer a moral in addiction to that offered in the final part.[151] This follows the general tendency toward the amplification of the text. The one moral sentence of the classic beast fable expands to reach a number of stanzas that are sometimes comparable in length to the narrative section of the fable. The characterisation of each animal is often considered individually and made to match the social, political

[149] Wittig, p. 35.
[150] Mann, pp. 265-267.
[151] Mann, p. 267.

or religious setting of the time. In "The Wolf and the Lamb" the lamb represents poor and humble people, such as farmers, who are oppressed by lords and lawyers, symbolized instead by the wolf. Not all the moralities are about social things. Indeed, about half of them show a metaphorical leaning and the animals become the allegory of good or evil characters.

Furthermore, the impersonal manner of the classic beast fable is lost. Throughout the fables there is a steady presence of the narrator. His first-person presence is both in the narrative section and in the final moralization, the latter being his personal opinion on the implications of the fable in a human context. The narrator gets involved in several ways in the narrative of the fables: often he acts as an observer or reporter of the action, as eavesdropper – in "The Preaching of the Swallow" – as someone who listens in on as he passes by – in "The Sheep and the Dog" – or even drawing aside to let the animals confess – in "The Fox and the Wolf". However, his personal participation reaches the highest degree in the fable of "The Lion and the Mouse", the opening of which resembles the conventional dream allegory. Wandering into a beautiful countryside he falls asleep and dreams of an encounter with Aesop, who tells him the story. In this dream, like in other parts of the fables, there is emotional involvement in the sharp observation and the individual realism.[152]

All the features of classic beast fables seem to disappear: narrative shortness and sparseness, linguistic moderation, a terse practical moral, impartial and impersonal tone, what Henryson himself identifies in his Prologue with the 'polite

[152] Wittig, p. 37.

termes of sweit rhetore'.[153] In Henryson the merely speaking animals of classic beast fables can really debate and quarrel, suggest an interpretation, and also draw their conclusions. They approximate the loquacity of the animals in beast epic and this animates the narrative. Moreover, the expansion of the moralities gives them a new expressive stress. Any reader of the *Morall Fabillis* can recognize the excellent results.

As well as the sources mentioned above, scholars have identified other works that Henryson could have used as grounds for his *Morall Fabillis*: Caxton's *Reynard and Aesop*, *The Fabules* of John Lydgate, Gualterus Anglicus's *Isopet,* Petrus Alfonsi's *Disciplina clericalis,* and the *Fabulae* of Odo of Cheriton among the others. Comparison with the sources shows affinities and differences that offer insights into the author's technical and creative ability. Moreover, the sources also play an important contribution in the dating and the integrity in the *Morall Fabillis.*[154]

The surviving complete or semi-complete versions, in early manuscripts and printed texts, come from a time long after the work was written. Unfortunately, no fifteenth-century text of the fables has survived. The earliest printed text is that published by Robert Lekpreuik for Henry Charteris in 1570, but probably the most accurate is that published the year after (1571) by Thomas Bassandyne. Two other printed texts, the Smith version of 1577 and the Hart version of 1621, are of less consideration. Undoubtedly, more importance can be attributed to the manuscripts, particularly to the Bannatyne MS, dating 1568. Although it includes Henryson's works in a general collection with poems by Dunbar and Holland, it seems to be the

[153] Mann, p. 270.

[154] Robert L. Kindric, "Introduction" in *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, Kalamazoo, Michigan: Western Michigan University, 1997, pp. 11-12.

best text existing for the ten fables it contains. The second most important is Harley MS 3865, copied in 1571. Other existing texts are incomplete. For instance, the Makculloch MS in the National Library of Scotland is probably quite early (it belongs to the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century), but it contains only the "Prologue" and "The Cock and the Jasp", while the Asloan MS (c. 1515-1525) includes only a single fable, "The Two Mice".[155] There are questions about the order of the fables and the completeness of the collection. Although it is not clear whether the author had completed his work, the ending of the last fable "The Paddock and the Mouse" in Bassandyne, Harley and Charteris texts sounds like a farewell:

> Adew, my friend, ...
> Now Christ for vs that diet on the rude,
> Of saull and lyfe as thow art Salviour,
> Grant vs till pas in till ane blissit hour. (2973-75)

and the first fable, "The Cock and the Jasp", is the first one also in the Aesopic collection, used by Henryson. These elements give the work an idea of completeness and unity. The Bannatyne MS and the Asloan MS, which have a different order, may represent a reordering or a selection.[156]

Henryson's prologue is based upon that of Gualterus Anglicus, but it is far more determined and wider in scope. It is shorter than the text of the fables – only nine stanzas – but it provides a clear and thorough account of many of Henryson's techniques and approaches used in all of the subsequent fables. It states the function, method and manner of his poetry with accurate definitions. The author deals with ethic and moral issues with the intention of understanding man and his position in the universe. The fables, that are pure invention, and hardly based on facts, prove to be interesting and delightful whilst enabling the readers to comprehend the deeper,

[155] Kindrick, *Robert Henryson*, p. 58.
[156] Douglas Gray, *Robert Henryson*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 32.

underlying moral meanings. The moral message becomes pleasant through the use of rhetoric, by means of arrangement and style. For Henryson, a pleasant style is a vital element of poetry and he achieves it through the use of symbolism and of figurative language. Despite his modest disclaimers of rhetorical ability, he is a skilled rhetorician.[157] The relationship of man with the animal world is also fundamental. Henryson's words in his Prologue

> My author in his fabillis tellis how
> That brutal beistis spak and undestude,
> And to gude purpois dispute and argow,
> Ane sillogisme propone, and eik conclude,
> Put in exempill and similitude
> How mony men in operatioun
> Ar like to beistis in conditioun. (43-49)

can be related to another recurrent theme, that is the opposition between reason and instinct. The beast fable implies a natural and constant comparison of the nature of man with that of beasts, which take human characteristics. In fact, the animal world can be considered in these fables the mirror-image of the world of men. However, Henryson's animal portrayal is not a mere caricature of human features. Instead, the animal characters in his fables live in full independence and are endowed with human characteristics and models of behaviour, whilst beholding the characteristics of their own animal kind. Henryson's art lies in providing his characters with a careful balance of animal and human features.[158]

2.7. The Animals

In the bestiary section discussed hereafter, the five animals selected in Henryson's *Fables* have been analysed. I have considered their characteristics and the meaning they take for the exegetical purposes of the writer. This task was made

[157] Kindrick, *Robert Henryson*, pp. 65-67.
[158] Gray, pp. 72-73.

easier by the fact that bestiary itself is structured in such a way that in each section the features and the related meanings of the beast are explained. The texts are one for each animal and the content, both real and fantastic, is far from being a story in which speaking animals interact with each other as human beings in disguise. This makes Henryson's *Fables* hard to analyse and understand. The only shrewdness has been to add up to the information of the reference book (MS Bodley 764) the further that the other four texts could implement. In the sections that follow, the specific features of each animal will be explored, including their physical characteristics, their behaviour and the interpretation the author gives of them as they are presented in each fable and in the situations where the animal features.

2.7.1. The Cock

The cock "performs" in two of the thirteen fables: I. "The Cock and the Jasp" and III. "The Cock and the Fox". The first, like the *elegiac Romulus*'s first fable, is of Aesopic tradition. In Henryson's collection it is the shortest – only fourteen stanzas – and, owing to its almost complete lack of action, the least interesting in the development of the plot consisting of a simple "speaking picture" with a single character and a single episode.[159] Nevertheless, it is considered one of the most intricate in terms of its interpretation. In stanza 1 'ane cok sum tyme with feddram fresch and gay' (64)[160] flies upon a dunghill. While scraping for food it finds a Jasp. "Jasp" is the old name for a semi-precious stone now known as "jasper", a quartz of varied and intense colours. It was highly valued in the Middle Ages, almost as the diamond is today. Afterwards, in stanza 8, the cock leaves this jewel lying on the

[159] Kindrick, *Robert Henryson*, p. 68.
[160] All quotations from the *Morall Fabillis* are taken from Robert L. Kindric ed. *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, Kalamazoo, Michigan: Western Michigan University, 1997.

ground and continues looking for food, its main business as specified in stanza 1: 'to get his dennar set was al his cure' (67). The stanzas between 1 and 8, after a straying on 'wantoun and insolent' (71) maidens, record the culmination of the narrative section with the central monologue of the cock. The time seems to be still and it frames the "personal" considerations and feelings of the cock.[161] It praises its poor life in humble style and when it turns to the precious stone its style becomes high and rhetorical. This incongruence makes the animal seem rather comic.[162] In the end, after the dignified praise of the jewel, it brings its conclusive sentence 'Thow ganis not for me, nor I for the' (112): the precious stone is useless to it. Throughout the fable the nature of the animal, the cock, appears in its simplicity and candour. It is a real rooster which obviously lives in a barnyard and eats worms. Its decision to reject the jewel that cannot feed it on the ground seems therefore obvious to the reader, who normally recognizes the common sense of the cock and sympathizes with it. It is, after all, an animal and all it is interested in is the immediate need of its stomach, simply following its natural instinct to survive.

At the point of transition between narrative and moralization, in the last lines of stanza 8, Henryson changes tone and speaker. He interposes a first-person sentence to indicate that he is going to explain the tale's moral, as far as he is able:

> Bot of the inward sentence and intent
> Of this fabill, as myne author dois write,
> I sall reheirs in rude an hamelie dite. (117-19)

In the subsequent moralization, he suggests the clues for the correct interpretation of the fable. However, he suddenly changes the favourable perspective on the cock moving toward the opposite direction of the narrative. In the tale the

[161] Gray, p. 91.
[162] Mann, p. 300.

cock's reasoning follows medieval theology and common sense.[163] However Henryson, searching the inward sense, condemns the cock's conduct.

> This cok, desyrand mair the sempill corne
> Than ony iasp, may till ane fule be peir,
> Quhilk at science makis bot ane moik and scorne,
> And na gude can; als lytill will he leir –
> His hart wammillis wyse argumentis to heir,
> As dois ane sow to quhome man for the nanis
> In hir draf troich wald saw the precious stanis. (141-47)

It is compared to a fool and to an ignorant who scorns science, scoffs at learning and despises what it does not understand. By contrast, the precious stone represents a series of remarkable qualities. Linked to the lore of medieval lapidaries, it has seven properties, including the ability to make man strong, prudent and wise. Its great virtue helps man to escape fleshly vices and to defeat the spiritual enemy.[164] It represents prudence and knowledge, the everlasting riches man has the duty to seek. The cock's rejection of these qualities is the equivalent of man's anti-intellectual and anti-theological reaction to science and religion. The cock represents a type of individual common to all societies at all times. However, it uses many of the basic principles of medieval reasoning in its rejection of the jewel[165] and the values that the latter represents are also disregarded in medieval times. Therefore, it is quite sure that Henryson, in his consideration, is speaking of the medieval society and in all probability of the Scottish one. As Rowlands[166] has suggested, Henryson's consideration seems that of the disaffected scholar who disapproves of the attitude of his society or at least of a segment of it, just as he disapproves of the cock's rejection. He was despondent about the replacement of traditional medieval values with the impudent materialism of the developing Scottish society, which leaves

[163] Kindrick, *Robert Henryson*, p. 69.
[164] Kindrick, *Robert Henryson*, p. 69.
[165] Kindrick, *Robert Henryson*, p. 69.
[166] Mary Rowlands quoted in Kindrick *Robert Henryson*, p. 70.

intellectual and moral concern for the search of riches. Riches that, like an animal's needs, satisfy only man's physical appetites. The cock, choosing the dunghill, stands for the world of physical senses. Henryson emphasizes this analysis comparing the cock to a sow, the traditional symbol of gluttony. The jewel betokens spiritual and intellectual riches. The rejection of the jasp is a rejection of reason and wisdom.

The cock appears also in the fable "The Cock and the Fox", one of the five fables in the beast-epic tradition. This fable is the most Chaucerian of Henryson's fables. Its closest source can certainly be found in Chaucer's "Nun's Priest's Tale". The scheme is indeed the same as in Chaucer, even if the extension, the style and the approach taken are different. Henryson modified it in ways that suit his thematic interests.[167] The story tells how a treacherous fox, Lawrence, flatters Chanticleir, the cock, by asking it to crow with its eyes closed. The cock is captured, then escapes when dogs come after the fox. As in the Reynardian tradition the main animal's characters of the tale have a personal name.

> For thy as now, I purpose for to wryte
> Ane cais I fand quhilk fell this ather yeir
> Betwix ane foxe and gentill Chantecleir. (408-10)

Chanticleir is a gentle and beautiful cock which lives with a tiny flock of hens in the small farm of a poor widow (all elements that correspond with those of Chaucer's story).

> Except off hennis scho had ane lyttill flok,
> And thame to keip scho had ane jolie cok,
> Richt curageous, that to this wedow ay
> Devydit nicht and crew befoir the day. (414-17)

The development of the narrative is on two levels: one level concerns the farmyard matters; the other is more courtly. Lawrence, the cunning fox, speaks to Chanticleir with words of reverence and submission. It makes a series of captivating

[167] A conclusion of MacDonald quoted in Kindrick *Robert Henryson*, p. 84.

compliments to the cock, emphasizing its service to Chanticleir's ancestors and in particular to its father. The clever extoller blinds the cock with praise of its family line and its personal appearance. Lawrence's words sometimes have sharp ambiguities and allusions, but Chanticleir is so taken by its flattery that it shrugs them off. It feels like a nobleman, proud of its aristocratic blood, accustomed to the deference of the servants. In this cocky attitude Henrysons may have made out the behaviour of a large number of medieval Scottish barons whose pretence to nobility was attested only by their family histories and traditions, a common form of claimed and superficial nobility that often disguised dishonourable deeds. Having spurred the vanity of the cock, the fox can play its greatest card.

> This fenyeit foxe, fals and dissimulate,
> Maid to this cok ane cavillatioun:
> 'Ye ar, me think, changit and degenerate
> Fra your father and his conditioun.
> Off craftie crawing he micht beir the croun,
> For he wald on his tais stand and craw.
> This wes na le; I stude beside and saw.' (460-66)

Here the fox changes its tone insinuating that Chanticleir is not up to follow the standards of his ancestors and, in the specific instance, that it is probably unable to crow like its father.[168] Therefore the cock, whose excessive pride makes it not discern the difference between true nobility and the false one in which Lawrence is skilful to make it believe, must try to reduce the fox's mistrust. The false nobility coincides with beautiful appearance and other surface aspects – the cock is 'inflate with wind and fals vane gloir' (474) – which Chanticleir is determined to prove to the fox.

> Traisting to win ane grit worschip thairfoir,
> Unwarlie winkand walkit up and doun,
> And syne to chant and craw he maid him boun –
> And suddandlie, be he had crawin ane note,
> The fox wes war, and hint him be the throte. (476-80)

[168] MacQueen, p. 209.

The cock's desire to win Lawrence's good opinion is the cause of its being seized and nearly killed.

An interlude of nine stanzas, which delays the concluding part of the action, tells about the reaction of the widow (the owner of the farm) and the hens to the cock's capture. The irony of their comments confirms the moral perception on Chanticleir shaped in its talk with the fox.

The action resumes with the widow who, recovering from her swoon, releases her hounds to try the rescue of her cock. When the dogs are on the trail of the fox – 'full wichtlie thay throw wood and wateris went, and ceissit not, schir Lourence quhill thay saw' (553-54) –, the latter realizes that it is being pursued and acts just as irrationally as Chanticleir did in earlier scenes. Incidentally, here the fox is duped with some of the same techniques it has used before on the cock. To outwit its enemy, Chanticleir makes use of the power of deceitful language it has learned from the fox. The Cock suggests the fox should turn around and tell its pursuers that they have become friends. Lawrence, so in fear for its life, heeds the cock's advice and 'he start about, and cryit as he wes kend; with that the cok he braid unto a bewch' (569-70). The deceived fox makes then a second attempt to capture the cock with flattery but, with its new found prudence, it ignores it and flies back to the widow's house.[169]

The author's comments appear briefly in the tale's prologue (stanza 1 and 2) where he explains that beasts lack the power of rational judgment and are driven by natural instinct. However, each one of them has a different character and gift that can be seen, for the cock and the fox, in the narration that follows. At the beginning of

[169] Kindrick, *Robert Henryson*, pp. 85-86.

the *Moralitas* he explains to a supposed audience – 'worthie folk' – that Lawrence and Chanticleir must be considered 'typis figurall' from whose conduct a lesson is to be drawn. Their social standing is relatively high.

> To our purpose this cok weill may we call
> Nyse proud men, woid and vaneglorious
> Of kin and blude, quhilk is presumpteous" (590-92)

The cock represents the social type of a pleasant but arrogant man, superficial and proud who, however, recognizes its ruin in time to escape with new prudence. Henryson returns to moral consideration by condemning pride, the cause of the fall of the angels and now that of any man who gives in to it. The fox personifies the flatterer, who uses every possible trick to manipulate other for satisfy his desires.[170] Both types must have been common in fifteenth-century Scotland: many of the old feudal nobles were doubtless as arrogant as the cock, while the fox symbolizes the courtier in the new government and political power (a popular impression of the courtiers surrounding James III).[171]

The comparison between the animals in the bestiary and the animals in the *Fables* is not a simple task. The two genres, approaching the animal world, adopt substantially different kinds of literary description and the animals features are consequently put together and presented in different ways. In the bestiary the features are almost listed in an analytical way, as if they were the empirical data of a scientific observer, even if we know that is not so. In the *Fables* the plots of the narration before and the *Moralitas* after give the clues and the interpretation about the animal's features and deeds.

[170] MacQueen, p. 215.
[171] Kindrick, *Robert Henryson,* p. 87.

2.7.1.1. The features and behaviour of the cock

The realistic characteristic of the cock common to both texts is that it is a crowing animal and it is generally accepted that it emits a lovely sound. The bestiary simply says that its crowing is "a pleasant sound at night".[172] This song is not only pleasant but useful and the brief text that follows focuses exclusively on the properties of this sound and the Christian message it bears. Indeed, the awakening is accompanied by the voice of the cock. The cock-crow marks the change from the darkness of the night to the light of the day. As it awakes, it encourages and comforts and, therefore, drives out the fear and the sinful deeds of men. At the cock's song Christ himself watches over and brings back the lost believers who recognize their sin (e.g. the instance of Peter when the cock crew thrice). In the *Fables* the crow of the cock is the cause and effect of what happens in the tale "The Cock and the Fox". A great crow together with a charming look are for the shallow Chanticleir the evidence of its aristocratic blood. The cunning fox, with pleasant and sweet words, praises the quality of the cock and of its ancestors, but it ably arouses the suspicion that Chanticleir is unable to crow like its father. The proud cock falls into the trap and, trying to demonstrate its ability to sing, is captured by the fox. Through the crow of the cock the plot of the fable develops and the author can draw a lesson from the animal behaviour in his *Moralitas*. 'For thy as now schortlie to conclude, thir twa sinnis, flatterie and vaneglore, ar vennomous: gude folk, fle thame thairfoir!' (611-13). The cock symbolizes the proud folk and the infernal spirit that lies in pride drives men to the inevitable fall.

In the bestiary there are few other details on the cock. These seem to be general

[172] Barber, p. 172.

notions – it is the only bird whose testicles are cut off – or popular belief – the ancients said that the limbs of this bird corrode in liquid gold and they called castrated men cockerels.

In the *Fables* the portrayal of the cock is more detailed. It is deeply observed in its physical features and in its common behaviour. It is a rooster 'with feddram fresch and gay' (64) in "The Cock and the Jasp" and its beautiful aspect makes it full of arrogance when, in "The Cock and the Fox", Lawrence, in a tone of flattery says 'Quhen I behald your fedderis fair and gent, your beik, your breist, your hekill, and your kame' (453-54). The natural context in which it is portrayed and its natural behaviour are also accurately described. In "The Cock and the Jasp" it 'fleu furth upon ane dunghill sone be day; to get his dennar set was al his cure' (66-67), and while scraping for food it finds a Jasp. It is a real rooster living in a barnyard and its main activity is to eats worms. The precious stone that it finds cannot feed it so it leaves the jewel lying on the ground and continues looking for food. In "The Cock and the Fox" the background is even more articulated. The handsome cock, whose first duty is to crow loudly to bring the day in, lives in a widow's small farm.

> Ane wedow dwelt in till ane drop thay dayis
> Quhilk wan hir fude of spinning on hir rok,
> And na mair had, forsuth, as the fabill sayis,
> Except off hennis scho had ane lyttill flok,
> And thame to keip scho had ane jolie cok,
> Richt courageous, that to this wedow ay
> Devydit nicht and crew befoir the day. (411-17)

The cock lives with a small flock of hens, which are witnesses of its misadventure and potential widows if the cock does not escape from the fox. Near the farm there is a dark wood where the sly and hungry fox hides. The setting is treated here in detail, while in the bestiary it is completely lacking. In the bestiary the cock is a static subject, whose features, not always real, are sketchily enunciated. The

cock and the other animals in the *Fables*, whose features and behaviour are those of the actual beasts found in real life, interact and speak like humans in disguise. They play characters that react and evolve during the development of the narrative. To escape from the fox the cock uses the same clever methods that the fox has used before with it. The vainglorious Chanticleir seems to have learned the lesson. The modification of plot and characters is a distinguishing feature of the fable.

2.7.1.2. The symbolic meaning of the cock

In the bestiary the main feature of the cock, its pleasant crow, is the heart of the message that the writer means to convey. Normally the voice of the cock wakes the sleepers. It marks the progress of the night towards the rising of the sun. Metaphorically, this symbolizes a transition from an adverse condition to a favourable one. Indeed, instances in the bestiary show this meaning. It 'encourages the downhearted and comforts the traveller'[173] bringing the human soul from a confused and disoriented state to a hopeful and sheltered one. The physiological awakening of man might, in this sense, represent his moral and spiritual revival from a previous state of misery and perdition. The bestiary continues by noting that hearing the cock's song also criminals, namely the robber, leaves his evil intent with the sunrise, as if the approaching of the daylight could only go with good and positive purposes. In the same way, at sunrise, the worried sailor in the stormy sea pins his hopes on the drop of the strong winds, which normally raise in the evening. After a list of situations that highlight the comfortable effects of the cock's crow, the final part of the text exalts its religious meaning. At the break of the cock's song the devotee collects his thoughts in prayer and the light of the sunrise anables him to

[173] Barber, p. 172.

read his books (presumably prayer books or breviaries) once more. The biblical example is that of Peter, "the rock of the Church".[174] According to the story, when he heard the cock crow thrice, he was aware of his sin denying Christ before cock-crow. However, he was absolved of the guilt of his deed thanks to the penitent recognition of it. Likewise, Christ watches over the lost and wandering souls and he brings them on the true path offering comfort and forgiveness.

The consideration above reveals that the cock is a kind of messenger. Indeed, "like a good neighbour"[175], with its song, it informs human beings about something that will soon happen. Furthermore, this message is eagerly awaited because it indicates that something good and comforting is about to happen, thereby bringing hope, relief and courage to everyone. Christ Himself, through the cock-crow, brings those who stray back to his forgiveness and great love. Indee, the three cock-crows were for Peter the sign of the presence of Christ, who forgave his denial after his penitent recognition. At the end the author quotes a passage based on the hymn from the breviary: 'Nothing happens by chance, but everything is done by the will of the Lord".[176] The cock-crow is also included in His divine plan, this strengthening the concept that all in nature is a sign of the presence and of the will of God.

In the fable "The Cock and the Jasp" the noble stone embodies great virtues:

> This gentill jasp, richt different of hew,
> Betakinnis perfite prudence and cunning,
> Ornate with mony deidis of vertew,
> Mair excellent than ony eirthly thing,
> Quhilk makis men in honour for to ring,
> Happie, and stark to wyn the victorie
> Of all vicis and spirituall enemie. (127-33)

'Perfite prudence' is religious wisdom and 'cunning' does not have the negative

[174] Barber, p. 173 and *Il Bestiario di Peterborough*, p. 67
[175] Barber, p. 172.
[176] Barber, p. 173.

meaning that the word has nowadays. It means knowledge and intelligence. Therefore the jewel represents both spirituality and reason.[177] For Henryson the cock can be compared to a fool that throws away immense riches. Indeed, the cock is only interested in earthly goods and its main activity is to find food that will satisfy its appetite. The great and everlasting riches of divine wisdom and knowledge, which can never be bought with worldly wealth, are rejected by the cock "as dois ane sow to quhome men for the ninis in hir draf troich wald saw the precious stanis" (146-47). The passage echoes the verses from the Sermon in the Gospel according to St Matthew:

> Nolite dare sanctum canibus: neque mittatis
> margaritas vestras ante porcos, ne forte
> conculcent eas pedibus suis, et converse
> dirumpant vos. (VII, 6) [178]

"To throw perls to pigs" has become an idiom meaning to give something precious and special to someone who cannot understand, appreciate nor take advance of it, that is completely useless just like the jewel is for Chanticleir. Unlike most living creatures, such as the cock and the sow, whose sole interest is to satisfy their physiological needs (i.e. their hunger), man was given the chance to access knowledge, thereby enabling him to have a deep and close relationship with God. 'Bot now, allace, this jasp is tynt an hid' (155). Here, speaking of his time, Henrysons expresses his pessimistic point of view on his contemporaries, identified by Kindrick in peasants or burgesses.[179] Indeed, knowledge and religion are regarded by these social categories as unimportant. In other words, like the cock, his contemporaries are oblivious to immaterial riches. Rowlands attributes this feature to the developing

[177] MacQueen, p. 82.

[178] Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

[179] Kindrick, *Robert Henryson*, p. 70.

Scottish middle class, subject to showy materialism.[180] Henryson condemns his fellow countrymen and, though he knows that what he is saying is a waste of breath, he ends his *Moralitas* with a glimmer of hope 'Ga seik the jasp, quha will, for thair it lay' (161).

In the first stanza of the *Moralitas* of "The Cock and the Fox" Henryson clearly explanins that 'under thir fenyeit termis textuall'(589) the animals of the fable – the cock and the fox – represent 'typis figurall'. In this perspective the cock embodies 'nyse proud men, woid and vaneglorious'(591). The sin of pride is the reason of its misadventure, which is compared to the fall of Lucifer and the rebel angels. The distorted vision caused by self-love makes the cock blind to the sly tricks of the cunning fox (here 'cunning' is used in its negative meaning). However, Chanticleir perceives its downfall just in time to save its life. When the fox is afraid of being captured by the dogs, the cock, 'with sum gude spirit inspyrit", seizes its chance to fool the fox with its own stratagem.

Based on the above considerations on the meanings of the cock in bestiary and fables, a clear difference can be observed. First of all, in the bestiary the cock is a positive figure, a bearer of good and holy messages to humankind. These meanings are the result of a "natural" feature of the cock: its crow. By contrast, in the fables the meanings are the effects of its human deeds and speech. Moreover, the interpretation they convey is negative. The cock embodies a fool in "The Cock and the Jasp" and a proud and reckless creature in "The Cock and the Fox". Notwithstanding, the negative implication of the cock's acts, the development of the stories and the *Moralitas* give mankind something to seize in order to avoid the "fall". This is stated

[180] May Rowlands quoted in Kindrick *Robert Henryson*, p. 70.

at the end of the first fable, in the author's final suggestion, where he invites the reader to look for the jasp (i.e. immaterial riches). In the second one, after Henryson recognizes the sins and their evil effects, he says 'gude folk, fle thame thairfoir!', namely what the cock does when it flies away from the mouth of the fox.

2.7.2. The Fox

Reynard, the fox, is to be found all over the literature of continental Europe from the twelfth century onwards. In England the signs of the portrayal of this deceitful beast are few and date way back in 1481, when Caxton published his English prose translation of *Die Historie van Reynaert die Vos*.[181]

In Henryson's *Morall Fabillis* the fox is the animal that probably makes a lasting impression on the reader, perhaps due to the fact that it frequently appears. Indeed, the fables that deal with the fox are five: III. "The Cock and the Fox", IV. "The Fox and the Wolf", V. "The Trial of the Fox", IX. "The Fox, the Wolf and the Cadger" and X. "The Fox, the Wolf and the Husbandman". The first three, which follow one another, form a sort of unbroken narrative unit – a mini beast-epic in three episodes.[182] In "The Cock and the Fox" and "The Fox and the Wolf" the same fox, Lawrence, is one of the main characters. In "The Trial of the Fox", Lawrence's son take its place in the scene.

As mentioned earlier, the fox attempting to catch the cock is to be found in the fable "The Cock and the Fox". 'This fenyeit foxe, fals and dissimulate, maid to this cok ane cavillatioun' (460-61); these words effectively sum up Lawrence's features and purpose. 'Dissimuland in to countenance and cheir' (432) it offers, in humble disguise, to serve the cock as it has already done with its ancestors. Its fawning

[181] Mann, p. 220.
[182] MacQueen, p. 197.

manner, together with its refined rhetoric, make the vain cock proud of its "misleading" noble birth and leads it to neglect true precautions. For this reason, it falls directly in the fox's jaws. Ironically, in the following acts, Lawrence is duped with some of the same approaches it used before, fooling the cock:

> This tod, thocht he wes fals and frivolus,
> And had frawdis, his querrel to defend,
> Desavit wes be menis richt mervelous,
> For falset failyeis ay at the latter end. (565-68)

Then, heeding the cock's advice to escape by the hounds, it opens its mouth to speak and straightaway Chanticleir flies up into a branch. Afterwards, its second attempt to capture the cock with adulation is also ignored, ultimately laying down, its final defeat.

> Leif we this wedow glaid, I yow assure,
> Off Chantecleir, mair blyith than I can tell,
> And speik we off the fatal aventure
> And destenie that to this foxe befell (614-17)

The first stanza of the following tale, "The Fox and the Wolf", sets a clear link with the previous story. The poet, whose presence in this fable is more perceptible than in the previous one, has left the widow, who is happy about Chanticleir coming back safe and sound, and turns to the final and fatal adventure of Lawrence. After its unsuccessful attempt on the cock, the fox lies hidden in the wood awaiting for the dark of the night, when

> Out off the wod unto ane hill he went,
> Quhair he micht se the tuinkling sternis cleir
> And all the planetis off the firmament,
> Thair cours and eik thair moving in thair spheir,
> Sum retrograde and sum stationeir,
> And off the zodiak in quhat degré
> Thay wer ilk ane, as Lowrence leirnit me. (628-34)

The fox has been taught how to read the planets and the constellations of the zodiac. Its trained eye can understand the astrological suggestions on its destiny. The result is death, the reward of its sinful life. Nevertheless, the fox can mend its bad

deeds with its future manner of living. Therefore it says 'I will ga seik sum confessour and schryiff me clene off my sinnis to this hour' (654-55). The dreadful idea of its death drives the fox to hurry to a friar to make its confession. The confession that follows is called by Lindsay "a masterpiece of good-humoured satire".[183] The fox meets 'ane worthie doctor in divinitie' (666) just out of the cloister. Wolf Waithskaith is a friar described as Franciscan by its grey apparel ('russet coull off gray'), as suggested by Kindrick[184] and MacQueen[185]. The wolf gives Lawrence consolation and gets ready to hear the fox's confession.

> "Weill," quod the wolff, "sit doun upon thy kne."
> And he doun bairheid sat full humilly,
> And syne began with "Benedicitie" (691-93)

The narrator moves away, showing his discretion to preserve the secret of the confession, but returns soon after to hear the discussion between the pair. The sacrament of penance is normally understood to be composed of three parts: contrition, forbearance and pain.[186] However, the wolf-friar only administers satisfaction when giving the penance, disregarding the other two. At the wolf's question 'Art thow contrite and sorie in thy spreit for thy trespas?' (698-99) the fox promptly answers

> "Na, schir, I can not duid.
> Me think that hennis ar sa honie sweit,
> And lambes flesche that new ar lettin bluid,
> For to repent my mynd can not concluid,
> Bot off this thing, that I haif slane sa few." (699-703)

After the astrological presages, Lawrence is worried about its future safety, which it can earn through confession. Its behaviour does not show any remorse for its earlier deeds, on the contrary, it is sorry it has slain so few. The friar admits the fox's

[183] Maurice Lindsay quoted in Kindrick *Robert Henryson*, p. 88.
[184] Kindrick, *Robert Henryson*, p. 88.
[185] MacQueen, p. 217.
[186] MacQueen, p. 217.

wickedness but, careless, it passes over it and asks ‘Will thow forbeir in tyme to cum, and mend?’ (706). Also future forbearance and amendment are unacceptable for the fox: how can it make a living without hunting? Eventually, Lawrence agrees to take penance and declares “Yit nevertheles I wald, swa it wer licht, schort, and not grevand to my tendernes”(719-20). The initial penalty – the abstinence from flesh until Easter (for some eight months) – is too severe, especially for a fox. To indulge its appeals the wolf enables the fox to eat flesh twice a week and quickly absolves the penitent.

Later the fox, actually meaning to carry out its confessor’s instructions, plans to live entirely on fish. It approaches a river but soon realizes that, without neither boat nor bait, its fishing will be fruitless. It thinks its chance of eating is lost while ‘under ane tre he saw ane trip off gait’ (744). Its good intention suddenly disappears. It hides behind a bush and grabs a kid from the flock. After that it runs to the river and drowns the kid dipping it a number of times in the water saying ‘Ga doun, schir Kid, cum up, schir Salmond, agane’ (751). By doing so it intends to rename the kid ‘salmon’ to keep up appearances of its penance. Then it takes the dead creature to the shore and eats it. After that it goes toward a bush to have some rest and imprudently says ‘Upon this wame set wer ane bolt full meit’ (760), unaware of the presence of the angered goatherd. He sees where Lawrence is laying and shoots its heart with an arrow ‘and for his kid and uther violence, he tuke his skyn and maid ane recompence’ (773-74). For its sin the fox is punished with death and therefore the opening astrological presage comes true.

The following tale, “The Trial of the Fox”, is the third in the Lawrence series. The dead fox of the previous tale has no legal heirs ‘except ane sone, the quhilk in

adulterie he gotten had in purches privelie' (799-800). This bastard son is called 'Father-war' and, because of its lineage – 'off wrangus get cummis wrang successioun' (806) – it is inclined to wicked deeds, even worse than those of its father. Henryson immediately provides an example of such pitiless wickedness in the opening scene 'the sone wes fane he fand his father deid' (818). It raises its corpse on its back and throws it in deep and dark water 'and to the Devill he gaif his banis to keip' (830), all the while thanking God for the inheritance which it has just taken possession of. The lengthy introduction to this younger fox makes it clear that it is its father's son, thus making the reader aware of the evil of the newcomer right from the start.[187] The tale continues with the sudden and noisy appearance of a unicorn, 'ane pursephant semelie'. On "kind" request of the 'nobill Lyoun, off all beistis the king' (855), the unicorn summons the flocked beasts 'to compeir befoir my tribunall, under all pane and perrell that may fall' (864-65). The assembly here described is more a court of justice than parliament in the modern sense. The appointment is fixed for the day after. When the solemn day comes three leopards fence the 'Royal Court', while the other animals assemble before the lion, in the order of their presumed social status. In the following five stanzas the author lists all the kinds of animals that the overawed fox can see. The list contains over sixty species and it is an accurate account of the animal world, which demonstrates its richness and variety.[188] The parliament of beasts resembles the Scottish one, that of Henryson's time. All of the estates of Scottish society are represented by the various types of animals. Mythological creatures, first of all 'ane monster mervelous', the minotaur, precede the parade and are followed by exotic beasts (the elephant, the dromedary and the

[187] Kindrick, *Robert Henryson*, p. 91.
[188] Gray, p. 79.

camel) and then by animals more familiar in fifteenth-century Scotland. The fox sorrowfully decides to take part to this crowded meeting. Indeed, it fears to be arraigned for its wicked deeds towards its father, to which the king's peace refers in its previous speech. Consequently

> Perplexit thus in his hart can he mene
> Throw falset how he micht him self defend.
> His hude he drew far doun attoure his ene,
> And winkand with the ane eye furth he wend.
> Clinscheand he come, that he micht not be kend,
> And for dreddour that he suld bene arreist,
> He playit bukhude behind, fra beist to beist. (964-970)

Only one animal is not present at the parliament: 'ane gray stude meir'. Afterwards, the king sees the fox in disguise and reveals it. Surprisingly, it asks the fox to be the king's ambassador to the mare. Lawrence is frightened rather than relieved and attempts to shift this responsibility by indicating the wolf which 'is better in ambassatry and mair cunning in clergie fer' (997-98). Then the angered King declares that both, the fox and the wolf, must go to summon the mare. The task turns out to be dangerous since the wolf is seriously wounded by a mare's kick.

> With that the meir gird him upon the gumis
> And straik the hattrell off his heid away;
> Halff out off lyif thair lenand doun he lay. (1022-24)

Afterwards, the fox declines to pursue the matter further, helps the wolf with the 'brokin skap' and they return to the court. The fox's imminent end is unexpected. Indeed, the cause of it is not its failure with the mare, but the slaughter of the lamb during its way back to the king. Indeed, just after its return to the court, a ewe asks the lion for justice for the fox's killing of its lamb. The fox is accused not only of the murder but also, with this, to have broken the peace that the king proclaimed at the beginning the of parliament assembly.

> Thay band him fast; the justice bad belyif
> To gif the dome, and tak off all his clais.
> The wolff, that new-maid doctour, couth him schrif;

Syne furth him led and to the gallous gais,
And at the ledder fute his leif he tais.
The aip wes bowcher and bad him sone ascend,
And hangit him, and thus he maid his end. (1090-96)

The fable of "The Fox, the Wolf and the Cadger" begins with 'Qwhylum thair wynnit in ane wildernes' (1951), which introduces the first character, an unfair wolf. The latter lives by stealing and, when it is hungry it is so strong that no animal can escape from its fury. One day it meets a fox approaching in its direction. The fox, that has seen it first, pretends to be overawed and welcomes the wolf, calling it Russell. It kneels down and takes it by its hand. The wolf lets magnanimously it rise and live. The fox obviously hopes to have nothing to do with the wolf, but the latter is determined to enjoy the fox's known cunning in stealing capons and hens and therefore asks it to be its steward.

"Schir," said the foxe, "that ganis not for me;
And I am rad, gif thay me se on far,
That at my figure beist and bird will skar." (1969-71)

The fox shows its reluctance to serve it and, at the repeated appraisals of the wolf on its undisputed skills in hunting, it goes so far as to deny what is obvious and even to complain its great sensibility, showing plain hypocrisy.

Than said the wolff, "Lowrence, I heir the le,
And castys for perrellis thy ginnes to defend;
Bot all thy sonyeis sall not availl the,
About the busk with wayis thocht thow wend.
Falset will failye ay at the latter end;
To bow at bidding and byde not quhill thow brest,
Thairfoir I giff the counsall for the best". (1993-99)

The wolf is becoming angry and threatening, so the fox finds a new excuse. It is Lent, the forty days of abstinence from meat before Easter, and Lawrence cannot fish. The wolf then loses its patience and says

Wenis thou with wylis
And with thy mony mowis me to mat?
It is ane auld dog, doutles, that thow begylis;
Thow wenis to drau the stra befoir the cat! (2007-10)

Finally the fox agrees to become its steward and the wolf expects its oath of loyalty. The fox swears "Be Juppiter, and on pane off my heid, I sall be treu to you quhill I be deid" (2026-27). By doing so, the fox in fact continues to deceive the wolf, even though it is now its master. Indeed, this particular pagan oath pronounced during Lent and Easter, means exactly the opposite of what it states. Truth then becomes lie and the head does not belong to the fox, but to the wolf.[189] This sounds like a warning sign on the destiny of the wolf. In the meanwhile a cadger with his horse and creels passes near the two beasts. Since the fox is now a servant, it will provide its master with food supplies. Pleading the cadger for just one herring would be a waste of time, so the fox says 'Bot yit I trou alsone that ye sall se giff I can craft to bleir yone carlis ee' (2040-41). Subsequently, it adds wittily

> I think to work als besie as ane be –
> And ye sall follou ane lytill efterwart
> And gadder hering, for that sall be your part. (2046-48)

After that, it arranges its deceptive plan. It runs beforehand the arrival of the cadger, taking a different route, and then it stretches its body down in the middle of the road, turning up the white of its eyes, hanging its tongue out between its teeth and keeping still as if it was dead. When the cadger arrives, he sees the fox and, blessing his luck, throws its carcass upon his creels. The fox can thus steal all his herrings and when the cadger looks back it is too late. The fox jumps down and runs away with its loot. Then the angry cadger threatens revenge "Abyde, and thou ane nekhering sall haif is worth my capill, creillis, and all the laif" (2089-90). The nekhering stands for the best herrings, in a container, placed on the top of the rest to attract the attention of the buyer[190], and this will be the cadger's attraction for the further robbery of the fox.

[189] MacQueen, p. 186.
[190] MacQueen, p. 185.

However, while the fox knows what nekhering means, the wolf does not and the fox does not explain it properly. In fact, at the wolf's question 'Kennis thou that hering?' it answers

> Ye, schir, I ken it weill,
> And at the creill mouth I had it thryis but dout:
> The wecht off it neir tit my tuskis out.
>
> Now suithlie, schir, micht we that hering fang,
> It wald be fische to us thir fourtie dayis. (2116-20)

Indeed, when the fox comes back with the herrings the wolf decides to emulate the fox's trick. Then, Lawrence explains down to the last detail the plan to it. The wolf follows carefully its instructions and lies down 'dead' on a stone, thinking about the desired nekhering that it will soon get. The cadger comes riding on his horse and when he sees the dead wolf 'softlie he said, "I wes begylit anis; be I begylit twyis, I schrew us baith!"' (2175-76) and brings his staff with violence upon the wolf's head. It catches other three blows but the wolf is so strong that it can run away. The fox watches the scene not far away and laughs loud when the wolf swoons on its knees. It is humiliated and the fox, satisfied, takes all the fish and leaves. At the end the wolf actually dies and

> The foxe in to his den sone drew him than,
> That had betraisit his maister and the man:
> The ane wantit the hering off his creillis;
> The utheris blude wes rynnand over his heillis. (2199-2202)

As in the previous tale, also in "The Fox, the Wolf and the Husbandman" there is a human presence together with the beasts. Indeed, a farmer whose 'use wes ay in morning to ryse air' (2233) to steer his own plough appears in the tale. He first begins with a blessing but, when his herd of young oxen are unruly to his orders, he angrily says 'the wolff mot have you all at anis!' (2244), unaware that the wolf is nearby. Indeed, both it and Lawrence lie in a dense thicket at the furrow's end and hear the

threat. Obviously Lawrence, always ready to catch every single occasion, says to the wolf 'To tak yone bud it wer na skaith'(2249). The wolf accepts the fox's suggestion. At the end of the day, when the famer, is coming home from work with his team of oxen, the wolf appears to demand what the farmer promised to it in the morning. Despite his denial the wolf insists on its rights and the husbandman relies on the law.

> Gaif I my hand or oblissing" quod he,
> "Or have ye witnes or writ for to schau?
> Schir, reif me not, bot go and seik the lau." (2277-79)

The adamant wolf proposes a witness and calls Lawrence 'cum hidder of that schaw, and say na thing bot as thow hard and saw' (2292-93). The cunning fox, instead of simply giving evidence, purposes itself as judge:

> Bot wald ye baith submit yow heir to me,
> To stand at my decreit perpetuall,
> To pleis baith I suld preif, gif it may fall. (2303-05)

and therefore it presents itself deceitfully as friend of both with the words 'Now I am juge amycabill'. It offers to help them to solve the case if they will be bound by its judgment. The wolf and the husbandman agree.

> The wolff braid furth his fute, the man his hand,
> And on the toddis taill sworne thay ar to stand. (2313-14)

Then the fox takes the husbandman to one side and, considering his situation quite troubled – 'the wolff will not forgif the ane oxe hyde' (2317) –, it offers him its help. On the pretext of keeping its conscience clear, it suggests, instead of a trial, a transgression of the law. Indeed, since the husbandman's defence 'will not throu but grit coist and expence' (2321), a bribe is exactly what he needs. This way, the fox wins from the husbandman a promise

> "Schir," said the man, "ye sall have sex or sevin
> Richt off the fattest hennis off all the floik –
> I compt not all the laif, leif me the coik." (2326-28)

Normally a reliable judge should not be bribed, however, because it is evening, God

has gone to sleep and ‘sic small thingis ar not sene in to His sicht’ (2333). Therefore, despite its office, the fox is open to such gifts and reassures the husbandman ‘thir hennis sall mak thy quarrel sure’ (2334). With these words they come to an agreement and the farmer leaves the scene.

Meanwhile the wolf is waiting apart. After the man leaves, the fox comes back to the wolf. Having agreed to accept the husbandman’s bribe, now it has to satisfy the wolf. However, its covetousness makes it plan another trick also with its “colleague”, the wolf, which has called it only as a witness. Always appealing to its conscience, it tries to defend the farmer.

> “The hecht, ” quod he, “yone man maid at the pleuch –
> Is that the cause quhy ye the cattel craif?”
> Halff in to heithing said Lowrence than, and leuch:
> “Schir, be the Rude, unroikit now ye raif:
> The Devill ane stirk taill thairfoir sall ye haif!
> Wald I tak it upon my conscience
> To do sa pure ane man as yone offence? (2343-49)

Grudgingly, the wolf abandons its claim on the husbandman’s oxen in return for a ‘cabok’, a cheese of great value. Then the fox takes the wolf to the place where the husbandman has told it where the cheese lies.

> Throw woddis waist thir freikis on fute can fair,
> Fra busk to busk, quhill neir midnycht and mair. (2376-77)

On the way the fox is thinking about the trick with which it could deceive the wolf, and finally it finds the appropriate stratagem. Then they arrive to ‘ane manure place’ where they find a well with a doubled rope hung down and two buckets hanging on each of the two ends. The night is clear and the moon is full. The well reflects the shadow of the moon and it really resembles a round cheese.

> “Schir,” said Lowrence, “anis ye sall find me leill;
> Now se ye not the caboik weill your sell,
> Quhyte as ane neip and round als as ane seill?
> He hang it yonder that na man suld it steill.
> Schir, traist ye weill, yone caboik ye se hing
> Micht be ane present to ony lord or king.” (2393-98)

The fox jumps into a bucket and descends to take out the cheese. Its weight makes the other bucket rise, while the wolf holds the rope. When Lawrence is at the bottom of the well it says to the wolf that the cheese is too big for it and that it needs help to lift it. Then it asks the wolf to come down so both will be able to lift the cheese. The wolf jumps into the other bucket and its heavier weight makes the bucket of the fox rise. While it is dropping down the fox comes back to the top and

> "Schir," quod the foxe, "thus fairis it off fortoun:
> As ane cummis up, scho quheillis ane uther doun." (2418-19)

Finally the wolf hits the cold water of the bottom of the well and the fox runs away leaving it to yelling with anger.

2.7.2.1. The features and behaviour of the fox

As to the physical features of the fox, both the bestiary and Henryson's *Morall Fabillis* are poor. Some cursory hints to its real appearance are given, for example, by the fox itself in the tale "The Fox, the Wolf and the Cadger". In this fable the wolf asks the fox to be its steward, praising repeatedly its excellent ability in hunting. Lawrence, the worry of which is to escape from this situation, tries to refuse such a great task, ironically pleading its unsuitability. Among the reasons of its supposed failure in hunting there are some of its physical features, which put its victims quickly to flight.

> "Schir", said the foxe, "ye knaw my roib is reid,
> And thairfoir thair will na beist abyde me,
> Thocht I wald be sa fals as for to hyde me." (1976-78)

> "Schir", said the foxe, "that beist ye mycht call blind
> That micht not eschaip than fra me ane myle:
> How micht I ane off thame that wyis begyle?
> My tippit twa eiris and my twa gray ene
> Garris me be kend quhair I wes never sene." (1988-92)

Therefore, red coat, pointed ears and grey eyes, even if barely mentioned, are the fox's main distinctive physical signs in the fables.

In the bestiary the fox has no physical characterization, apart from its "very supple feet". [191] Indeed, with its nimble feet the fox runs in a tortuous way, preferring narrow gorges to straight paths. Its Latin name *vulpes* may come from *volupia*, the goddess of pleasure. The interpretation would assign to the fox the features of a movable and fickle beast. As said in the *Cambridge Bestiary,* it moves flightily. This behaviour is followed by a clear definition, which leaves no doubt on the nature of this beast. It is a "crafty and deceitful"[192] animal. As evidence of this concise definition, all the texts of the bestiaries continue with the account of what happens when the fox is hungry and cannot find anything to eat, namely, its clever trick to cheat the birds to catch them. The latter consists in lying on the ground feigning to be dead and when the birds fly down on it to feed with what they think to be the fox's carcass, it promptly seizes and devours them. The skill of the fox in this plan, the attention to details (the red earth used to seem spotted with blood, the hardly breathing and the tongue hanging out used to seem dead) and its patience to lie still for most of the day[193] to better deceive the unlucky birds, are the signs of its clever and insidious nature.

A variant of the same trick is used by the fox in the fable of "The Fox, the Wolf and the Cadger", where it pretends to be dead lying, without a movement, on the way of the cadger. The latter, seeing the dead fox and glad of this unexpected luck, takes the fox and puts it on the creels full of his herrings. Then he turns to lead his horse in the meanwhile the fox steals all his fish and runs away.

The cruel ability to cheat its companions, normally in misadventure, is a

[191] Barber, p. 65.
[192] "Of fox" in Aberdeen Bestiary (Aberdeen University Library MS 24), Colin McLaren & Aberdeen University Library, in *http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary,* December 2012.
[193] Faraci, p. 65.

classical feature of the fox in all the fables. Its victims are, without distinction, every other animal, but in most cases the chosen one is the wolf. In the following section the fox's behaviour will be analyzed for each fable, to disclose the clever tricks of this ruthless animal.

In the "The Cock and the Fox", Lawrence appears in the fourth stanza

> Ane lyttill fra this foirsaid wedowis hows,
> Ane thornie schaw thair wes off grit defence,
> Quhairin ane foxe, craftie and cautelous,
> Maid his repair an daylie residence,
> Quhilk to this wedow did grit violence
> In pyking off pultrie baith day and nicht,
> And na way be revengit on him scho micht. (418-24)

Its usual shelter and house is the dark wood where it hides devising its obscure and wicked plans. It is dangerous for the unfortunate man or animal which is in the proximity. Here the predetermined victim, among the poultry of the widow, is the cock. Lawrence uses all its wiles as a hunter to have Chanticleir, like its father before it, firmly between its jaws.

The strategy is carefully calculated to fool the cock with gentle courtesy. Indeed Lawrence presents itself as a devoted old servant of the dead father of the cock

> Dissimuland in to countenance and cheir,
> On kneis fell and simuland thus he said,
> "Gude morne, my maister, gentill Chantecleir!" (432-34)
> …
> "I come bot heir service to yow too mak.
>
> Wald I not serve to yow, it wer bot blame,
> As I have done to yowr progenitouris. (438-40)

and adopts a priestly tone such as that of a domestic chaplain of a great family[194], when, at the cock's question 'Knew ye my father?', it says

> Yea, my fair sone, I held his heid
> Quhen that he deit under ane birkin beuch,
> Syne said the Dirigie quhen that he wes deid. (447-49)

[194] MacQueen, p. 207.

The fox's sly skill in persuading the cock is rendered by the great mastery of Henryson in a dialogue that, in some cases, produces ironic puns. At the fox's compliments on its family line and on its personal beauty, the gullible cock is so bewitched by the flattering fox that it cannot perceive to be cheated and, inevitably, falls into the fox's jaws.

Nevertheless, the development of the story reverses the fates of the two animals and the fox, too, falls victim to some of the same techniques it has used on the cock before. Indeed, heeding the cock's advice, it lets the cock escape; its second attempt to capture the cock will also fail.

In the "The Fox and the Wolf", after the defeat, the fox of the previous tale has to lie still among the bushes, waiting for the dark of the night, when it can contrive its shady deals. Therefore, darkness is not only its refuge, but also represents a suitable moment for its diabolic plans and deeds. For this reason, when the sun goes down, Lawrence comes out. By studying the planets and the constellations it acquires a superhuman power of observation[195] and it is able to predict its future.

> My destenie and eik my weird I watt,
> My aventure is cleirlie to me kend,
> With mischeif myngit is my mortall fait
> My misleving the soner bot gif I mend;
> Deid is reward off sin ane schamefull end. (649-53)

Then the fox hurries to a friar to mend its bad deeds. The friar is the wolf, but in this fable it is not the victim of the fox. It interacts with the fox in the confession and it will indulge the fox's whims. Conversely, the fated victim is the fox itself. Its deadly fate has been told and, despite its weak attempt to behave properly – 'to fang him fisch haillelie wes his intent' (735) –, the events seem to follow in this direction and the fox seems to give them help. Its insatiable appetite will be the reason for its ruin

[195] MacQueen, p. 219.

and also in the confession the fox shows its incapacity to control its evil instinct. Indeed at the wolf's question "Art thow contrite and sorie in thy spreit fot thy trespas?" (698-99), it says that not only it cannot repent of its sins but also that it is proudly sorry "I haif slane sa few" (703). From the Christian's point of view, the fox could be considered a hopeless case. In the following penance, the fox even asks for a reduction of the punishment saying

> Na, schir, considder my complexioun,
> Seikly and waik, and off my nature tender;
> Lo, will ye se, I am baith lene and sklender.
>
> Yit nevertheles I wald, swa it wer licht,
> Schort, and not grevand to my tendernes,
> Tak part off pane, fulfill it gif I micht,
> To set my selie saull in way off grace. (716-22)

At the fox's masterpiece of deceitfulness, the wolf complies with its plea and the previous eight-months fast is reduced

> For grit mister I gif the leif to dude
> Twyse in the oulk, for neid may haif na law. (730-31)

Therefore, the confession of the fox shows its selfish worry to save its tough skin and its almost complete indifference and sometimes veiled contempt toward religious and moral principles. This irreverent behaviour is particularly clear, for example, when the fox grabs a kid from the flock. To keep up the appearances of its penance, it drowns the kid in the river, dipping it a number of times in the water feigning to administer baptism, so as to rename the kid 'Salmond'. In the fox's plan, this ritual will enable it to eat the dead kid without sin.

In "The Trial of the Fox" 'this foirsaid foxe that deit for his misdeid' (796) has an illegitimate son, conceived in 'purches privelie'. 'Father-war' is its name which follows perfectly its natural instinct, as did its ancestors. It even seems that things go from bad to worse from generation to generation. Therefore the fox's breeding leads

also this ‘bastard’ son to lie and steal even more greedily and unscrupulously than its father and grandfather had done before him. The issue of the illegitimate son and its consequent hereditary succession to the goods of the dead father-fox are usually human concerns. By contrast, it is natural animal (and not human) instinct that leads the young fox to follow its ancestors into their bad “career”. However, the clever wickedness of this animal is so marked that it seems more a human than an animal feature. In the development of the story this fox will show, in other situations, its great talent to “follow” human behaviour. The interchange of human and beast nature is a constant feature in the fox’s character, as exemplified in the following excerpt:

> As nature will, seikand his meit be sent,
> Off cace he fand his fatheris carioun,
> Nakit, new slane, and till him hes he went. (810-12)

Returning to the human trait, its wicked nature remains pitiless even when it sees the horribly mangled body of its father (‘nakit’ probably means skinned). However, the fox’s unkind and venomous greed reaches its highest peak when, near the dead body of the father,

> Tuke up his heid, and on his kne fell doun,
> Thankand grit God off that conclusioun,
> And said, “Now sall I bruke, sen I am air,
> The boundis quhair thow wes wont for to repair.” (813-16)

Its following ironic ‘naturall pietie’ that makes it carry off its father’s body on its back and throw it into ‘ane peitpoit gais off watter full’ (828-29), all the while thanking God for this luck and commending its father’s bones to the devil, is one of Henryson’s masterly rendering of the fox’s character. That is not simply the expression of a bad and cunning animal, but of a complex many-sided personality that represents no doubt a negative moral example to avoid, but also ironical and unexpected attitudes that make it appear a funny and even “likable” character. The sensation is that of a fickle character, which could, in every moment, surprise the

reader, transforming the hard and grave situations in comical and ridiculous sketches. Therefore, the smile is occasionally inevitable.

After the unusual burial of the father, the young fox takes some rest, hidden in an inaccessible place as usual – this time in 'ane craig' – when it suddenly hears the bugle blow of the unicorn, which, as King's herald, calls all the animals to a parliament at the lion's presence. The author's look, which so far has focused only on the fox's character, now abandons it to describe the preparations and the presentation of all the beasts taking part in the parliament of the following day. During this assembly, the mention to 'the tod Lowrie luke not to the lam' (945) in the proclamation of the king's peace frightens Lawrence so much that 'quaikand for dreid and sichand couth he say, "Allace, this hour, allace, this dulefull day!"' (955-56) because it is sure that this parliament "is maid to mar sic misdoars as me" (959). However, as on other occasions, the fox is not discouraged and immediately devises a plan to save its life. The ensuing scene of the fox that first appears at the parliament in disguise as a one-eyed cripple and 'playit bukhude behind, fra beist to beist' (970), probably makes the reader laugh, while the resigned author rails against the incorrigible behaviour of the fox:

> O fylit spreit, and cankerit conscience!
> Befoir ane roy renyeit with richteousnes,
> Blakinnit cheikis and schamefull countenance!
> Fairweill thy fame; now gone it all thy grace!
> The phisnomie, the favour off thy face,
> For thy defence is foull and disfigurate,
> Brocht to the licht basit, blunt, and blait. (971-77)

The previous condition of sudden fright is unexpectedly changed into a comical situation. This is an almost regular attitude of the fox which responds to the unfavourable conditions with resourcefulness and solutions that often play down and even make fun of its previous panic attacks. Turning back to the fable, this play-

acting of the fox does not confuse the lion, which recognizes it and, surprisingly, asks it to be the king's ambassador to a mare which has failed to appear before the court. Any other animal in the fox's place, after being revealed by the lion and moreover not punished – as the fox feared – would be relieved and would readily accept the task asked by the king. By contrast, the fox invents excuses to refuse the royal commission and, furthermore, it nominates the wolf, its usual predestined victim, as a better ambassador:

> Na, schir, mercie! Lo, I have bot ane ee,
> Hurt in the hoche, and cruikit as ye may se.
> The wolff Is better in ambassatry
> And mair cunning in clergie fer than I. (995-98)

It cannot be said that this fox was a meek and passive animal, but its attempt to shift the task of responsibility given by the lion does not show courage but rather arrogance. In this case the lion is able to set limits to its impudent pride and 'rampand he said, "Ga furth, ye brybouris baith!"' (999).

Therefore the two animals set off and, when they find the mare, the fox tries to persuade it to come to the court. The mare, whose sentence 'Let be, Lowrence, your cowrtlie knax' (1005) shows that it already knows the fox's evil intent, declines the invitation and wants to show it, that it has a respite. Despite its claim to have only one eye, the cunning fox is well able to see the possible dangers and, suspecting a trick, refuses to inquire further and sends the wolf ahead praising its wider diplomatic experience and greater learning, as it did with the lion in the previous scene.

> Heir is the wolff, ane nobill clerk at all,
> And of this message is maid principall.
>
> He is autentik, and ane man of age,
> And hes grit practik of the chanceliary. (1011-14)

The fox shows a natural craftiness in relieving itself of all responsibilities and

involving someone else in its place. Indeed, the wolf with both eyes but 'blindit with pryde', is ready to inspect the mare's evidence under its hind hoof. However, when it bends down, the mare kicks it in the head, badly wounding it. After this, Lawrence, quoting '*Felix quem faciunt aliena pericula cautum*' (1033)[196] declines to pursue the matter further. This unexpected prudence is in the fox's behaviour a mere selfish preservation in a situation it has unwillingly taken part in. Afterwards, to help the wolf to retrace its way, the fox goes to look for water. Coming from the moor, it meets a small flock of lambs by chance and

> This tratour tod, this tirrant, and this tyke,
> The fattest off this flock he fellit hais,
> And eit his fill; syne to the wolff he gais. (1045-47)

Afterwards, they return to the court and when the lion demands to know why the mare did not come with them, the first sentence of the fox is 'My lord, spear not at me', which means "it is not my fault" and it puts the blame on the wolf with a word play about its red broken head

> This new-maid doctour off divinitie,
> With his reid cap can tell yow weill aneuch. (1052-53)

However, the fox has to answer for another fault, about which its lies will not help it to save its life. Indeed, the mother of the lamb asks the lion justice for the fox's killing of its kid. The accusation is twofold: not only the fox committed murder, but in so doing it has also broken the king's peace, proclaimed at the beginning of the parliament. The fox still tries to give its version of the facts by lying bluntly to the king:

> My purpois wes with him for to haif plaid.
> Causles he fled as he had bene effraid;
> For dreid off deith, he duschit over ane dyke
> And brak his nek. (1079-82)

[196] "Happy are those who learn from the suffering of others" translated in Kindrick, *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, p. 52.

The impudent fox is able to deny the obvious, in fact, as the ewe says, the evident deceitfulness of its version is easily proved by the signs of its guilt.

> His deith be practik may be previt eith:
> Thy gorrie gumis and thy bludie snout –
> The woll, the flasche, yit stikkis on thy teith –
> And that is evidence aneuch, but dout. (1083-86)

Indeed, the jury finds Lawrence guilty and, after being absolved by the wolf, it is summarily hanged.

In the fable "The Fox, the Wolf and the Husbandman" we find Lawrence and its almost inseparable mate, the wolf, lying in a wild thicket just nearby the furrows' end where the farmer, in a moment of temper, angrily says to his unruly plough-oxen 'the wolff mot have you all at anis' (2244). As usual, the dark and secluded place is the favourite refuge of the fox, where, as in this case, it plans its evil devices. What is also shown is the fox's preference for the dark, as when it is called to witness by the wolf 'come lourand, for he lufit never licht' (2294). Every chance is right for the fox to gain the greatest self-interest, so after the words of the farmer, it says "to tak yone bud, it wer na skaith" (2249), encouraging the wolf to pretend what it has been given. This could be seen as an unselfish gesture towards the wolf, but one must not believe the fox's kind care towards others, because the fox has already planned its sly advantage in a very elaborate and ambitious plan. Its advice to the wolf to pursue the matter is only the first step. In the dispute between the wolf and the husbandman the fox is called to witness in favour of the wolf, but it soon becomes fairly clear that it intends to trap the wolf rather than the husbandman. Indeed, at the legal demand for possession of the wolf, the farmer suggests to take the matter to court. The wolf proposes another means of deciding the issue, and calls Lawrence to witness. The sly fox, instead of merely providing evidence, turns the handling of the dispute towards

arbitration.

> "Schir," said the tod, " I can not hastelie
> Swa sone as noe gif sentence finall;
> Bot wald ye baith submit yow heir to me,
> Top stand at my decreit perpetuall,
> To pleis baith I suld preif, gif it may fall." (2301-05)

The fox presents itself deceitfully as a friend of both parties, but its conduct is suspicious throughout. Its hatred of the light, as previously stressed, brings to mind its fallacious nature, thus an unsuitable characteristic for a judge. The suspicion about its lack of honesty is reinforced by the way it makes its judgment. Taking the farmer to one side it wins from him a bribe of six or seven hens giving the following absurd justification

> I may tak hennis and caponis weill aneuch,
> For God is gane to sleip, as for this nycht;
> Sic small thingis ar no sene in to His sicht.
> Thir hennis," quod he, "sall mak thy quarrel sure:
> With emptie hand na man suld halkis lure." (2331-35)

Now, having agreed to accept the husbandman's bribe, the fox has to satisfy the wolf, naturally using its usual logic of self interest of gaining the greatest possible benefit. Therefore, to preserve its considerable bribe, it promises the wolf a big piece of cheese if only it will drop its demand towards the farmer. Reluctantly, the wolf agrees and the subsequent events are the final test of Lawrence's great skill in fooling the gullible wolf. First the fox tricks the wolf into believing that the shadow of the moon in the well is the cheese and then convincing it to come down into the well to claim its cheese and leaving it at the bottom.

2.7.2.2. The symbolic meaning of the fox

The attitude towards the fox is the same in both texts, the bestiary and the fables. Already from the first lines, this animal is recognized as a negative and wicked subject. Indeed, the bestiary clearly reports that it is a bad, clever and

cheating beast as demonstrated by its behaviour. It is considered bad and it is hated by man because it often steals and devours the farm animals (cocks, cockerels, geese). It is clever because its keen mind enables it to plan sly devices to reach its goals and it is cheating because it resorts to deception to catch the other animals. Its rambling way of running is revealing of its devious behaviour. For these features and after the account of its specific conduct to catch birds, the fox is shown as the symbol of the devil, who seems to be harmless and pretends to do no damage do mankind, while in fact he leads man to sin in order to later punish him. Man, who, like birds, is tempted by earthly desires, approaches the devil (the fox) unaware and this will lead him to eternal death. Only those believe in God are free from his power.

While the bestiary describes only one behaviour that clearly shows the evil intent of the fox, in the fables the negative symbol is a dynamic character which explores the manifold chance to carry out its evil intents. The *Moralitas,* at the end of each fable, summarizes the main behavioural features of the animals linking them to the moral parallel in human world. Moreover, in the developing of the tale, the author gives to the fox or to its behaviour social and political meanings connected with his times. In "The Cock and the Fox", 'this fenyeit foxe may weill be figurate to flatteraris' (600-01), who hide their intents with pleasant and sweet words. These wicked minds take only care of themselves while, with false praises, they poison their victims to cheat them. Indeed, Lawrence extols the personal beauty and the "noble" descent of the cock only to make it fall to its knees. In fifteenth-century Scotland, the character of the fox could be recognized as typical of the courtier's flattery of a noble lord. Indeed, it does whatever it takes to please the lord, acting in

an excessive and false manner.[197] If the cock represents the old feudal nobility abusing its rights, the character of the fox, presented as a loyal family servant, shows the popular impression on the courtiers surrounding James III. Therefore, it symbolizes the new value system of administration and political power, accustomed to conspiracy and insinuation, in contrast with the knightly values of the feudal system.[198] Furthermore, the fox poses as a clergyman at the deathbed of the cock's father with a feigned charitable attitude. Although there is no explicit historical reference, this characterization could be seen as a veiled disapproval of the church.

In "The Fox and the Wolf" the first stanza of the *Moralitas* explains the moral function of the fox:

> This suddand deith and unpruvysit end
> Of this fals tod, without contritioun,
> Exempill is exhortand folk to mend,
> For dreid of sic ane lyke conclusioun;
> For mony gois now to confessioun
> Can no repent, nor for thair sinnis greit,
> Because thay think thair lustie lyfe sa sweit. (775-81)

That the fox is a sinner is already implied in its character, but its story also clearly displays the end reserved for the impenitent sinner: death. Henryson criticizes the unrepentant evil person who, like the fox, makes the sacrament of confession a mockery by hypocrisy. Indeed, to satisfy its earthly appetite without infringing on the confession's terms, the fox is able to drown the kid dipping it a number of times in the water and in the meantime, by the use of clever language, to rename it salmon so as to transform it into a fish and safely eat it. In this scene the fox is merciless towards the kid, but its irreverent and desecrating ways to administer the baptism are even worse.

Having said this, at the end of the fable Henryson gives instructions to avoid

[197] Kindrick, *Robert Henryson*, p. 85.
[198] Kindrick, *Robert Henryson*, p. 87.

the horrible downfall of an unrepentant sinner:

> Ceis of your sin; remord your conscience;
> Do wilfull pennance here; and ye sall wen,
> Efter your deith, to blis withouttin end. (793-95)

In "The Trial of the Fox" the meaning of the fox is not immediately clear as in the other fables.

> This tod I likkin to temptationis,
> Beirand to mynd mony thochtis vane,
> That daylie sagis men of religiounis
> Cryand to thame, "Cum to the warld agane!" (1132-35)

The *Moralitas* contains no reference to the episode of the slaughter of the lamb, for which the fox is executed at the end of the fable. The murder of the lamb, which has always symbolized the innocence of the sacrificial victim, makes the fox a despot and a traitor because its behaviour has also broken the king's peace. In this episode the fox is subjugated to the appetite and this will cause its downfall. However, in the *Moralitas* the fox is itself both temptation and tempter leading the imprudent towards perdition. It is to the mare that the fox especially addresses its appeal. The mare represents the whole class of men of contemplation, namely men of religious houses and orders. For a fifteenth-century Scottish churchman, the attempt to corrupt a religious order is a clear attack on the church itself, and therefore the worst offence that the fox could give in its escalation of evil behaviour.[199] It is not a coincidence that its name is 'Father-war' and it is inclined to wicked deeds, even worse than those of its father.

In the development of the fable the fox becomes unwillingly also the king's ambassador to the mare, perhaps just to show the arbitrary way in which affairs are managed at court. Therefore, as a trustworthy servant, the fox represents the will of the king. This reasoning could explain the involvement of the fox in a moral

[199] MacQueen, p. 241.

interpretation – the temptation – that could be grasped only with the link to the medieval political scene in Scotland. Indeed, throughout the reign of James III there was a debate between the church and the king about the nomination of the beneficed clergymen. The crown was attempting to extend its power on the church's authority while, on the other side, a series of papal decrees were trying to undercut the king's power.[200] Therefore, the lion and its "followers", in this case the fox with its temptations, can all gain from the weakening of the religious order.

In the *Moralitas* of "The Fox, the Wolf and the Cadger" the author explains the "moralitie" with a curious comparison about the fox:

> The fox unto the warld may likkinnit be;
> The revand wolf unto ane man, but leis;
> The cadgear, deith, quhome under all man preis –
> That ever tuke lyfe throw cours of kynd man dee,
> As man, and beist, and fische in to the see. (2205-09)

Therefore the fox may be compared to the world, which is a kind of steward to man and helps him forget his inevitable death. This feudal bond is the same to which the fox has been forced by the wolf. Furthermore, the world urges man to greed. Similarly, the fox acts greedily by spurring the wolf to steal the herrings of the cadger with the promises of the nekhering. The world, and consequently the fox, are regarded as a major cause of sin. They are false and back the sense of social importance of man-wolf. Nevertheless, the ultimate responsibility falls on man-wolf, who forces the world-fox to become his steward, thinking he will live forever and will increase his pride in earthly possessions.

In the last fable, "The Fox, the Wolf and the Husbandman", the fox is the evil protagonist which leads man to commit unfair deeds.

> The foxe, the feind I call into this cais,
> Arctand ilk man to ryn unrychteous rinkis,

[200] Kindrick, *Robert Henryson,* p. 93.

Thinkand thairthrow to lok him in his linkis. (2431-33)

It entraps the wicked man, the wolf, and the upright man, the husbandman, indiscriminately in its net, promising earthly wealth. It ironically calls these riches 'the wood waist', that is the hills and woods where all the action takes place. The illusory cheese that the fox promises to the wolf, stands for covetousness, for which the wolf will "descend" to the bottom of the well, namely the hell of unrepentant souls.

Henryson seems to be more indulgent towards godly and poor men (the husband). The hens with which he bribes the fox are penance done for foolish and not for evil deeds. Indeed, he blesses the godly man with the closing line of the fable 'Christ keip all Christianis from that wickit well!' (2454).

2.7.3. The Wolf

Compared to the other animals, the wolf holds the record number of fables in which it appears – six – exceeding its famous companion, the fox, by one fable. The fables with the wolf are IV. "The Fox and the Wolf", V. "The Trial of the Fox", IX. "The Fox, the Wolf and the Cadger", X. "The Fox, the Wolf and the Husbandman", XI "The Wolf and the Wether" and XII. "The Wolf and the Lamb".

As already mentioned, in the first four fables the wolf is seen acting normally, paired with the fox. In "The Fox and the Wolf", the fox, terrified by astrological predictions about its near death, hurries to the wolf to make its confession. The wolf comes on the scene.

Ane worthie doctour in divinitie,
Freir Wolff Waitskaith, in science wonder sle,
To preiche and pray was new cum fra the closter,
With beidis in hand, sayand his Pater Noster. (666-69)

The fox, taking off its hood and kneeling, approaches the wolf with deferential words

Ye ar the lanterne and the sicker way
Suld gyde sic sempill folk as me to grace;
Your bair feit and your russet coull off gray,
Your lene cheik, your paill and pietious face,
Schawis to me your perfite halines;
For weill wer him that anis in his lyve
Had hap to yow his sinnis for to schryve. (677-83)

The wolf is identified as a Franciscan by its grey cowl and its outward appearance is that of a fifteenth-century meditative friar. The fact that the author chooses a wolf to represent a friar is unusual. Indeed, very often in the fables the wolf has the role of tyrant and inevitably arouses suspicion. Moreover, here its holy appearance probably alerts the reader, who will catch the author's ironic intent in the wolf's following actions. Indeed, the real personality of the wolf is belied under its godly disguise. The author's specification 'in science wonder sle' could already point to a feature of the wolf which is not so holy. Another hint may be seen in its inappropriate laughter in a serious situation, which reveals its irresponsibility in a role of such importance as giving consolation to a sinner.[201]

"A, selie Lowrence," quod the wolf, and leuch,
"It plesis me that ye ar penitent." (684-85)

However, the clear proof of the incongruity of the wolf's apparent holiness is shown when it does not respect the three parts of the sacrament of penance. After hearing Lawrence's confession, it asks about true contrition. The fox does not repent at all and, as it impudently says, it cannot also forbear in the future, because it could not leave without its main 'work'. The wolf recognizes that there are these unforgivable faults, but they may forget about them and therefore says

Weill thow wantis pointis twa
Belangand to perfyte confessioun;
To the thrid part off pennance let us ga:
Uill thow tak pane for thy trasgressioun? (712-15).

In the third point the fox is prepared to accept the sentence but asks for a

[201] MacQueen, p. 217.

reduction of punishment, which, with indulgence, the wolf grants quoting this proverb: 'for neid may haif na law'(731). It is a dangerous sentence particularly when used by a clergyman in his confessor role. [202] However, with this sentence, the wolf completes its duty and the fox is absolved.

In "The Trial of the Fox" the wolf is a stooge for the fox, the leading role of the fable. Indeed, the fox, trying to refuse the diplomatic mission to the mare, recommends the wolf to the lion

> The wolff is better in ambassatry
> And mair cunning in clergie fer than I. (997-98)

Until that moment, the wolf is not even named among the animals which the author can bring to mind in the gathering for the parliament. The wolf is suggested by the fox for its wide diplomatic experience and its great learning. However, the lion sends both to summon the mare. The first appearance of the wolf does not go with a speaking part. Unlike the fox, it accepts, without uttering a word, the king's demand and sets out with Lawrence to find the mare. Likewise, at the presence of the mare its speaking is terse. The cunning fox, suspecting a trap from the mare, suggests the wolf's assistance and drives it to inspect the evidence of the mare. The few words that the wolf exchanges with the mare are the only ones it says in the entire fable.

> "Quhair is thy respite?" quod the wolff in hy.
> "Schir, it is heir under my hufe, weill hid."
> "Hald up thy heill", quod he, and so scho did. (1017-19)

Although 'he wes blindit with pryde', it bends down to look at the mare's hoof unready to receive a strong kick on its head. Therefore, the "wise" fox declines to pursue the matter further and helps the seriously wounded wolf to go back to the court.

> With brokin skap and bludie cheikis reid,

[202] MacQueen, p. 218.

This wolff weipand on his wayis went,
Off his menye markand to get remeid;
To tell the king the cace wes his intent. (1034-37)

In front of the court the fox explains why the mare did not come with them and again calls attention on the wolf's ecclesiastic conditions. At the lion's question "Quhair is yone meir, schir Tod, wes contumax?" (1050) it replies

This new-maid doctour off divinitie,
With his reid cap can tell yow well aneuch. (1052-53)

The 'reid cap' of the wolf, which actually indicates its broken head covered with blood, is the hint for the ironical allusion of the fox to the wolf's ecclesiastic vestment.

However, it is always the fox, pressed by the lion, that tells what happened. At the end of the account the lion, to add insult to injury toward the wolf, says

Be yone reid cap I ken
This taill is trew, quha tent unto it takis.
The greitest clerkis ar not the wysest men;
The hurt off ane happie the uther makis. (1062-65)

Afterwards, the wolf leaves the scene and the court focuses its attention exclusively on the fox.

In the first fable, "The Fox and the Wolf", the wolf interacts with the fox only for the time of the dubious confession. In the second fable, "The Trial of the Fox", the wolf has more a walk-on part rather than an active participation. In the following fables it takes an active part in the plot. In "The Fox, the Wolf and the Cadger" the feudal relationship of loyalty that is established between the wolf (the lord) and the fox (its servant) is strongly wanted by the wolf. At the beginning of the fable, the wolf comes across the fox quite by accident. However, the long-lasting feudal relationship between them is evident particularly when greeting one another.

"Welcome to me," quod he, "thow Russell gray."
Syne loutit doun, and tuke him be the hand:
"Ryse up, Lowrence! I leif the for to stand." (1962-64)

Assigning the servant's office to the fox, the wolf imagines Lawrence as a profitable source of 'caponis' and 'hennis'.

> Thow sall beir office, and my stewart be,
> For thow can knap doun caponis on the nicht,
> And lourand law thow can gar hennis de. (1966-69)

The hunting abilities of the fox are well known and, therefore, the wolf argues its suitability to serve it. The fox, which would rather refuse the wolf's proposal, continues impudently to deny its skill. The wolf, which is not dull at all, recognizes the attempts of the fox making fun of it.

> Than said the wolff, "Lowrence, I heir the le,
> And castys for perrellis thy ginnes to defend;
> Bot all thy sonyeis sall not availl the,
> About the busk with wayis thocht thow wend. (1993-96)

Therefore, at the umpteenth attempt to refuse by the fox, it becomes angry, forcing the fox to admit

> Bot nou I se he is ane fule perfay
> That with his maister fallis in ressoning. (2014-15)

and finally to agree to be its steward

> I sall fulfill in all thing your bidding,
> Quhat ever ye charge on nichtis or on dayis. (2018-19)

To conclude the feudal agreement, the wolf insists on an oath of loyalty by the fox. This proves to be a mistake, because the fox swears loyalty in the name of Jupiter, a pagan oath that means the opposite of what it seems to say and therefore nothing good for the wolf.[203] Indeed, the rest of the fable shows the wolf's downfall, in contrast with the fox's climb to success. It all begins with the immediate new entry of the cadger with his horse and creels. With the intention to carry out its task of worthy servant, the fox will provide supplies to its master. It plans and carries out its deceit towards the cadger with its feigned death. Afterwards, the wolf decides to

[203] MacQueen, p. 186.

imitate the fox's trick so as to get the 'nekhering' that the angry cadger has promised to the fox. The wolf does not know what 'nekhering' means and, gullible, it believes in the lie that the cunning fox tells it.

> It is ane syde off salmond, as it wair,
> And callour, pypand lyke ane pertrik ee:
> It is worth all the hering ye have thair –
> Ye, and we had it swa, is it worth sic thre. (2126-29)

The chance of such a rich loot is the wolf's only thought, so it carefully follows the fox's instructions.

> Als styll he lay as he wer verray deid,
> Rakkand na thing off the carlis favour nor feid,
> Bot ever upon the nekhering he thinkis,
> And quyte foryettis the foxe and all his wrinkis. (2164-67)

However, not willing to be tricked again, the cadger approaching the "dead" wolf, hits its head with his staff. Although he continues to hit with other blows, the wolf is strong enough to run away. Mortified by the fox, it swoons on its knees and finally dies.

The last fable that deals with both the fox and the wolf is "The Fox, the Wolf and the Husbandman". The wolf lies with the fox in a dense thicket when it overhears the husbandman. The latter, in a fit of anger, cries out that he desires the wolf might take his unruly oxen. Following the fox's advice to pursue the matter, at the end of the day's work, the wolf appears to the husbandman to demand what has been vowed.

> Quhether dryvis thou this pray?
> I chalenge it, for nane off thame ar thyne! (2259-60)
> …..
> Carll, gaif thou not me this drift
> Airlie, quhen thou wes eirrand on yone bank? (2266-67)

Its tone and rude manners are the expression of a displayed superiority over a subordinate. Despite the farmer's refusal, the wolf insists on its rights. At the wolf's claim of possession, the husbandman, albeit in a lower tone, responds in kind

> Schir, ane man may say in greif,
> And syne ganesay fra he avise and se.
> I hecht to steill, am I thairfoir ane theif?
> God forbid, schir, all hechtis suld haldin be. (2273-76)

and suggests to take the matter to the court. The wolf's adamant response underlines the hierarchy that divides it (the lord) from the farmer (the man).

> "Carll," quod the wolff, "ane lord, and he be leill,
> That schrinkis for schame, or doutis to be repruvit –
> His sau is ay als sickker as his seill.
> Fy on the leid that is not leill and lufit!
> Thy argument is fals, and eik contrufit,
> For it is said in proverb:"But lawte
> All uther vertewis ar nocht worth ane fle." (2280-86)

The husbandman does not give up, but the wolf has an ace up its sleeve: it proposes a witness and calls Lawrence "cum hidder of that schwa" (2292) to testify against the husbandman. We already know the ability of the fox to transform its mere task as a witness into the important role of a judge. The wolf hopefully accepts it, declaring "weill, I am content for me" (2306). However, it is clear that the fox is trying to take the greatest advantage of the situation. Indeed, it wins from the farmer a bribe of a number of hens to settle the dispute and, therefore, when it returns to the wolf, it has to convince it to drop its case against the husbandman. To satisfy the wolf, then, it promises a cheese of great price – 'baith fresche anf fair'. The wolf hesitates before accepting

> "Is that thy cousell", quod the wolff, "I do,
> That yone carll for ane cabok suld fre? (2357-58)

Therefore the fox takes the wolf where the farmer told it the cheese lies. The illusory effect of the moon's reflection on the water in the well is the new trick of the fox: by asking the wolf for assistance in bringing out the cheese, it beguiles the wolf.

In "The Wolf and the Wether" a new human figure appears, a simple shepherd, living near a forest with his flock. He also has a faithful hound which gives him great support by watching over his flock day and night. Therefore, in its presence, neither

wolf, nor wildcat, nor fox, nor any other beast is able to steal a single sheep from this flock. However, as everyone must die, 'this hound off suddand seiknes to be deid' (2463). The sad shepherd knows that now there is no way to save his flock from the ravenous beasts, and, while he is lamenting his misfortune, the wether, a castrated ram, surprisingly offers him its brave help. It proposes to disguise itself in the hound's skin thereby protecting the flock against all the beasts. The relieved shepherd accepts the proposal and disappears from the scene after saying "Quha sayis ane scheip is daft, thay lieit of it." (2492). The wether takes the hound's place and initially its conduct is faultless and effective.

> Yit happinnit thair ane hungrie wolff to slyde
> Out throw his scheip, quhair thay lay on ane le:
> "I sall have ane," quod he, "quhat ever betyde,
> Thocht I be werryit, for hunger or I de," (2511-14)

Then the wolf catches a lamb and runs away with the wether running swiftly and restlessly after it to catch its foe. The fleeing wolf increases its pace and runs with all its strength.

> Fra he the wedder sa neir command had sene,
> He dred his lyfe, and he overtane had bene.
> Thairfoir he spairit nowther busk nor boig,
> For weill he kennit the kenenes off the doig. (2528-31)

At last it is forced to drop its prey and, therefore, the wether's duty is fulfilled. However, the wether declares

> Na in faith we part not swa:
> It is not the lamb, bot the, that I desyre;
> I sall cum neir, for now I se the tyre. (2534-36)

The wolf runs faster but the wether follows it so closely that it leaves the path and runs through bush and briar, trying to hide in the thickets. In this impervious wood the hound's hide gets caught in a briar and the wether is exposed for what it is. The wolf, glancing behind it, realizes that the fierce hound is instead a wether and says

> Na is this ye, that is sa neir?

Richt now ane hound, and now quhyte as ane freir. (2549-50)

and after the deadly fear it has suffered, the 'prettie play' of the wether is going to cost it dear. Indeed, the wolf kills it and tears it into pieces.

In "The Wolf and the Lamb" the two animals meet at a drinking spot: a riverside. The first to appear is 'ane cruell wolff, richt ravenous and fell' (2616) which quenches its thirst drinking the clear water of the river. Meanwhile, by pure chance, 'ane selie lamb' comes near, downstream from the wolf, and does the same. It is unaware of the wolf's presence. Then, both animals drink from the same river, but with different bent: the wolf with its wicked intent and the humble lamb with its innocent manner.

At last the wolf sees the lamb and, rearing up, comes toward it 'with girnand teith and angrie austre luke' (2630). It asserts that the lamb, with its 'foull lippis', has offended it by mudding the water it is drinking. The innocent lamb falls on its knees and asks for mercy. It bases its plea on the natural law that water runs downhill and never upwards and on the fact that its lips cannot be contagious since it sucks only milk from its mother.

"Weill," quod the wolff, "thy language rigorus
Cummis the off kind; swa thy father before
Held me at bait, baith with boist and schore, (2655-57)

and asserts its right to vindicate its father's offence on the lamb. The latter says that it is not right that, for its father's guilt, an innocent son should be killed. After this objection the wolf continues to defend its last intent citing even the Holy Scripture. The obstinate lamb, then, argues that the law forbids one man to take revenge on another without due trial and evidence. The wolf, used to shifting or ignoring moral values and intolerant of every form of true fairness, argues its own outlook on justice

Na, thou wald intruse ressoun

> Quhair wrang and reif suld duell in propertie.
> That is ane poynt and part of fals tressoun,
> For to gar reuth rename with crueltie. (2693-96)

Therefore, it passes the sentence: "Be Goddis woundis, fals tratour, thow sall de for thy trespas, and for thy fatheris als" (2697-98). The lamb can do nothing but bleat before the wolf strikes off its head without further delay, to then drink its blood and eat its flesh until it is full.

2.7.3.1. The features and behaviour of the wolf

Both texts agree in depicting the wolf as a strong and fierce wild beast. In the bestiary its main characteristic is savagery. It is so strong that its paws have the same strength as the lion's. It is so thirsty for blood that it kills greedily whatever it finds. Unlike its loins, its jaws and chests are powerful. The she–wolf bears cubs only in May, and when it thunders. It is so skilled that it does not catch food for its cubs near the lair, but far from it. When it has to catch pray by night, it moves like a tame dog to the sheepfold, staying upwind so that the sheepdog cannot smell its scent and wake the shepherd. Its eyes shine in the night like lamps. Some of the above features and others, that will be considered in the section of the symbolic meaning, are rather doubtful and are used explicitly to explain a connected spiritual meaning.

A physical description of the wolf is missing in both texts, apart from a hint in the fable "The Fox and the Wolf" where the worthy doctor of divinity, Friar Wolff Waitskaith, has a 'russet coull off gray'. This detail clearly represents the cowl that the wolf is wearing as friar, but it could be a clue to the natural colour of the wolf's coat. The wolf's features as seen in the bestiary – in particular strength and savagery – are confirmed in the fables, according to the situation and sometimes with nuances of meaning. The wickedness is clear in the last two fables, "The Wolf and the Wether" and "The Wolf and the Lamb", where the wolf shows almost exclusively its

predatory nature. The negative representation of the wolf both in the bestiary and in the fables is also stressed by its preference to live and lie, normally with its mate, the fox, in dark and hidden places (wood, thicket) where its wicked purposes are concealed.

In "The Wolf and the Lamb" the text already gives unequivocal indications on the wolf's evil nature. For example, its starting identification is already sufficient to label the character: 'ane cruell wolff, richt ravenous and fell' (2616). The second stanza reports that the wolf and the lamb are drinking at the same river but with very different frames of mind: the wolf 'thocht wes all on wickitnes' (2624). The rest of the story confirms its evil features and reveals the wolf's full intent of devour the innocent lamb. The lamb's attempts to beg the wolf to desist from its evil purpose are only a waste of time. The indifference and mercilessness towards the humble lamb, the indisputable assertion of its right to take revenge for the father's offence, the disbelief in reason and justice and the natural attitude to transform or ignore moral values are sufficient reasons to brand the wolf as a bad figure. However, its cruelty reaches the climax in the murder of the lamb and the following description of the wolf's bloody meal.

While in "The Wolf and the Lamb" the wolf's pitiless cruelty finds an almost passive resistance from the poor lamb, whose humble character does not allow it to contradict the wolf's vehemence and its overbearing manner, in "The Wolf and the Wether" things have a different development where the wolf cannot show its arrogance and predominance from the beginning of the fable. Indeed, first of all, the first animal character of the fable is the wether, on which the curiosity of the author is caught by the details that show its bravery and cleverness in resolving a difficult

situation and, therefore, showing its faithfulness towards the poor shepherd. Only in stanza 9

> Yit happinnit thair ane hungrie wolff to slyde
> Out throw his scheip, quhair thay lay on ane le. (2511-12)

Here the wolf is found in a classical situation, when, hungry, it is searching for food in the near of a flock of sheep. This wolf's attitude has been already seen in the bestiary. Therefore, in the same natural manner, rather than starve, it steals a lamb from the flock, taking the risk of being discovered and then chased. As expected, the hound of the shepherd is immediately hot on the wolf's heels. The latter is naturally worried about its life because it is unaware that the hound is the wether in disguise. The chase continues persistently and, if it turns out to be gripping for the reader, one can easily imagine the wolf's stress. The hound–wether does not give up.

> With that the wolff let out his taill on lenth,
> For he wes hungrie and it drew neir the ene,
> And schupe him for to ryn with all his strenth;
> Fra he the wedder sa neir cummand had sene,
> He dred his lyfe, and he overtane had bene.
> Thairfoir he spairit nowther busk nor boig,
> For weill he kennit the kenenes off the doig. (2525-31)

Afterwards, it gets rid actually of the lamb, to be lighter, but the relentless hound is no longer interested in getting the lamb, but now it 'desyre' right the wolf.

> Sone efter that, he followit him sa neir
> Quhill that the wolff for fleidnes fylit the field, (2539-40)

it leaves the fields and goes through brush and briar. The wether follows it but a bramble bush rips off the hound's skin and at the wolf's eyes a simple wether appears. The wolf realizes that it has been the victim of a deception. As already seen, the wolf in most fables is cheated, except for the previous one and for "The Fox and the Wolf", where its role is purely of confessor and it is not involved in the fox's affairs. Indeed, in the rest of the fables, the wolf is the main character on whom the

deceitful fox carries out its famous intrigues. While to be cheated by the fox, its equal, is humiliating enough, the trick of the wether, an inferior, is for the wolf a challenge to its reputation as a predator. As if this was not enough, the result of the wolf's fear is easily read by the wether.

> "Is this your bourding in ernist than?" quod he
> "For I am verray effeirit, and on flocht:
> Cum bak agane, and I sall let yow se."
> Than quhar the gait wes grimmit he him brocht:
> "Quhether call ye this fair play or nocht:
> To set your maister in sa fell effray,
> Quhill he for feirtnes hes fylit up the way?
>
> Thryis, be my saull, ye gart me schute behind:
> Upon my hoichis the senyeis may sene;
> For feiritnes full oft I fylit the wind." (2560-69)

The wether begs the wolf's pardon, but at this point the balance is restored: the wolf is again the predator-master and the wether the prey-servant. The pleas are useless. The wolf reasserts

> I have bene oftymis set in grit effray,
> Bot, be the Rude, sa rad yit wes I never
> As thow hes maid me with thy prettie play:
> I schot behind quhen thow overtuke me ever.
> Bot sikkerlie now sall we not disserver. (2581-85)

and then it murders the wether, tearing it into pieces, confirming its savagery.

In the other fables the wolf's cruel bent is less manifest and it often changes into other negative features. In "The Fox and the Wolf" the 'worthie doctor in divinitie' (666), seems oddly to have a constructive function: the confession and comfort to a damned sinner. This could seem so initially, but, when it administers the sacrament of confession to the fox, it reveals its incompetence. Indeed, it disregards condescendingly contrition and forbearance with sentences such as 'Sen thow can not forthink thy wickitnes' (705) or 'Weill, thow wantis pointis twa belangand to perfyte confessioun' (712-13) and finally, in the penance, it grants the reduction of punishment asked by the fox quoting the proverb: 'for neid may haif na law'(731).

Therefore, the wolf lacks the responsibility of its important duty and its permissiveness towards the real wicked character of the fable may reveal its concealed bent to evil deeds.

In "The Trial of the Fox" the wolf plays a minor role. Indeed, in exchange for its involvement in the king's mission under the fox's pressure, all it earns is a mare's kick on the head. It is so blind with pride that, unlike the cunning fox, it does not perceive the intention of the mare. Weeping for its broken head, it returns to the court 'off his menye markand to get remeid' (1036). As in "The Wolf and the Lamb" the wolf shows its thirst for revenge, but in "The Trial of the Fox" its thirst will not be satisfied.

At the beginning of "The Fox, the Wolf and the Cadger", the description of the wolf clarifies its nature at once.

> Qwhylum thair wynnit in ane wildernes,
> As myne authour expreslie can declair,
> Ane revand wolff, that levit upon purches
> On bestiall, and maid him weill to fair;
> Wes nane sa big about him he wald spair
> And he war hungrie, outher for favour or feid,
> Bot in his breith he weryt thame to deid. (1951-57)

Strength and savagery are its main features. Furthermore, the following encounter with the fox reveals its overbearing manner towards an inferior which ultimately has to accept to be its servant. However, the fox does not prove to be so submissive as the lamb and the wether, this making things very hard for the wolf. Indeed, in the second part of the fable the fox takes advantage of another bad element of the wolf's character: its strong greed. After the fox's deceitful theft of herrings to the cadger, the wolf aspires to emulate the fox's feat and it is stirred to action by the 'nekhering' that the angry cadger promises to the fox. The wolf does not know what it means and the clever fox leads it to believe that it is 'ane side off salmond' (2126). To win this

rich loot, the wolf carefully follows the instructions of the fox, but the cadger does not fall into the trap again and hits his staff three times on the wolf's head. The strength of the wolf allows it to go away but

> Baith deif and dosinnit, fall swonand on his kneis.
>
> He that of ressoun can not be content,
> Bot covetis all, is abill all to tyne. (2188-90)

Eventually, however, the wolf dies under the deadly wounds.

Unsurprisingly, like in the other fables, in "The Fox, the Wolf and the Husbandman" the fox is the bad fomenter of the wolf. Indeed, at the farmer's vow, the fox says 'to tak yone bud it wer na skaith' (2249), suggesting the wolf should pursue the matter. Then the wolf claims what is due to it, but the husbandman has no intention of giving up its oxen. Like the poor lamb in "The Wolf and the Lamb", with humble manner and reasoning on logic and law, at least he suggests to take the case to court. But bad characters, like that of the wolf, seem to be allergic to justice because of their guilty conscience. Therefore, the wolf calls to witness the fox, showing a unreserved faith in it, also when it rises to judge between the two opponents. A faith that will turn out excessive seeing how the fox will repay it. The wolf is first persuaded by the fox to give up its claims towards the farmer with the promise of some cheese.

> "Weill," quod the wolff, "it is aganis my will
> That yone carll for ane cabok suld ga quyte." (2364-65)

Here it is suspicious and it is not so sure that this is a fair exchange; despite this, it accepts grudgingly.

> I bid na mair to flyte,
> Bot I wald se yone cabok off sic pryis. (2368-69)

The move made by the fox is simple: it has shifted the wolf's voracity from the oxen to the fabulous cheese. Moreover, this cheese is the result of the moon's reflection on

the water of the well. In the end, the gullible wolf falls in the bottom of the well in the attempt of recovering an imaginary cheese.

2.7.3.2. The symbolic meaning of the wolf

"Nothing on which they tample can survive".[204] It is one of the most eloquent sentences about the wolf in the bestiary. Its rapacity and thirst for blood are acknowledged. Owing to this, prostitutes are called 'she-wolves' because they devastate the wealth of their lovers. All the negative features of this animal indicate its evil natural bent. It is the symbol of the devil and it is always envious of mankind. For instance, when catching a prey, it moves upwind closer to the sheepfold, thus continuously prowling about the flock of the church's believers, to corrupt them with the illusion of earthly riches. The fact that the she-wolf bears cubs in May when it thunders refers to the fall of the devil from heaven in his first sign of pride. The fact that it cannot turn its neck back means that the devil never denies his sins and therefore never repents.

In "The Fox and the Wolf" Henryson chooses a wolf to represent a friar. While in most fables, the wolf has symbolized an oppressor and a tyrant, this choice suggests that the intention of the author is to satirize members of the clergy. Indeed, despite the holy aspect of the wolf, it does not respect nor enforce the three parts of the sacrament of confession. Its indulgent manners towards the fox are the sign of a irresponsible attitude in a serious domain, such as the holy office.

In the "The Trial of the Fox" the wolf 'is autentik, and ane man of age, and hes grit practik of the chanceliary' (1013-14). It is a powerful character and its ecclesiastic background could indicate it as James III's appointee to the see, William Scheves, an

[204] Barber, p. 69.

influential and gullible person.[205] Also its 'reid cap', which is instead the blood on its head, refers to the ecclesiastic education and also the lion confirms it with the proverb 'the greitest clerkis ar not the wysest men' (1064). The attempt to persuade the mare to come to court is probably the effort of the king to obtain more ecclesiastical benefices.

In the *Moralitas* the wolf symbolizes sensuality, the bestial instinct that leads mankind to pursue the earthly pleasures of the world. The lion is the source of sensuality and the author suggest his reader to avoid vanity and carnality and return to rationality, breaking free from the wolf and the lion's power.

Through the relationship between the wolf and the fox, in the fable "The Fox, the Wolf and the Cadger" the author investigates the theme of feudal loyalty and all the negative features that often are involved: betrayal, infidelity, corruption. The portrayals of the two animals often have references to social classes in their attitude towards their master or their servant. At the beginning of their encounter, the wolf ask Lawrence "Quhair hest thow bene this sesoun fra my sicht?" (1965). This reproach can be that of the king, James III, who often complained about his nobles and officials for not coming to court.[206]

In the *Moralitas* the poet reinterprets the feudal bond between the fox and the wolf in the relation between the world and man. Indeed, Henryson attributes to each figure a generalized meaning. 'The revand wolf' becomes the symbol of man, not a specific man, as a proud baron can be, but simply man who is deceived by the world, symbolized by the fox. The herrings that tempt the wolf stand instead for gold, a symbol of greed for all kinds of earthly temptations. As the wolf forces the fox to

[205] Kindrick, *Robert Henryson*, p. 93.
[206] Kindrick, *Robert Henryson*, p. 110.

become its servant, so foolish man tries to control the world, because only the world has gold and can cheat death (the cadger). Man can aspire to worldly possessions but he will not live forever. Indeed, sooner or later death will arrive for man just as, eventually, the cadger will kill the wolf.

In "The Fox, the Wolf and the Husbandman" the farmer, blind with rage, vows his oxen to the wolf. It is as though they would be vowed to the devil and so this evil character wants what it has been promised. This is the occasion for Henryson to attacks the conduct of proud lords. Indeed, the wolf's presumption in claiming the oxen is clearly the same as that of the proud barons of the fifteenth century. The tale gives clues as to the social hierarchy between the wolf and husbandman. It is clear, by the tone and the behaviour of the wolf, that the farmer is a social inferior, who thus becomes the victim of the wolf's greed. Likewise, in Henryson's time peasants were often victims of the covetousness of Scottish lords. These were lawless nobles, who seized the property of the commons without fair trial. The farmer's assertion that their different points of view on the matter must be taken to court is obviously approved of by Henryson. Indeed, the Farmer's sentence "I may say and ganesay; I am na king." (2289) contains a double-edged political satire: not only does it express an ironic observation on James' rule, but also an attack on barons who used the King's own pronouncement to undeservingly take their benefits.[207] As in the previous tale, in the *Moralitas* Henryson shifts from the social implication to an allegorical level of interpretation, claiming that

> This wolf I likkin to ane wickit man
> Quhilk dois the pure oppres in everie place,
> And pykis at thame all querrellis that he can,
> Be rigour, reif, and uther wickitnes. (2427-30)

[207] Kindrick, *Robert Henryson,* p. 107.

Therefore the wolf does not represent corrupt lords but the wicked man who quarrels whenever he can, trying to deny the rights of others by twisting the law for his own interests. The victim of its vile swindles is the good man, in this fable obviously represented by the husbandman.

In the tale of "The Wolf and the Wether" the symbolism is mainly focused on the wether's character, from which the meaning of the wolf's role can be derived. In this fable, too, the wolf is a predator and certainly a negative figure, as compared to the shepherd and the wether. However, when it is followed by the wether's disguise, it really has a reason to be angry, just as the nobles in the Lauder rebellion had reasons for their revolt. Indeed, all the circumstances of the narrative reflect the incidents of the Lauder rebellion of 1482, a political demonstration by the nobles against the royal courtiers. The monarch James III, as the shepherd, is justified in its wish to protect his people, but fails to control the conduct of his courtiers. The latter, like the wether, exceed in their duties and power, attempting to destroy the existing political balance. Indeed, in the natural order the wether is subject to the power of the wolf. Its attempt to upset this order is the main cause of the wolf's anger.[208] Hence, it can be concluded that the *Moralitas* advises man against following the wether's example.

The *Moralitas* of "The Wolf and the Lamb" says "Thre kind of wolfis in this warld now rings" (2714). Therefore, the wolf's overbearing manner and presumption are the clues characterizing three types of oppressor of humble man (the sheep). The first type, 'fals perverteris of the lawis' (2715), is represented by the clever judge and the lawyer. These men have no moral values nor consideration for God. Furthermore,

[208] Kindrick, *Robert Henryson*, pp. 114-117.

they make untrue accusations and bring to trial false ones, suppressing common and poor people's rights.

The second type 'ar mychtie men, haifand aneuch plentie, quhilkis ar sa gredie and sa covetous' (2729-30), that is men who cannot leave poor men in peace, deriving pleasure from persecution of the poor and innocent. Even though they have enough, they mercilessly cheat and dispossess the tenants only to satisfy their greed.

The third type 'ar men of heritage' (2742) who seem to think that God gave them his land. In fifteenth-century Scotland there was the habit of demanding a ground-rent in advance in order to obtain rental lands. Therefore, taking advantage of this, many landlords developed the practice of evicting the tenants immediately after they paid the rent so as to be free to rent the property again, thereby collecting another ground-rent. Henryson condemns mainly this detestable practice in particular because of the fact that it made tenants' life extremely difficult.

After the explanation of the three kinds of wolfs, the poet closes the *Moralitas* with the following appeal

> God keip the lamb, quhilk is the innocent,
> From wolfis byit and men extortioneris;
> God grant that wrangous men of fals intent
> Be manifest, and punischit as effeiris;
> And God, as thow all rychteous prayer heiris,
> Mot saif our king, and gif him hart and hand
> All sic wolfis to banes of the land. (2770-76)

2.7.4. The Sheep

This section is entitled "The Sheep" but groups different animals of the same family: the sheep, the ewe, the lamb, the kid and the wether. The fables that deal with these animals are five: IV. "The Fox and the Wolf", V. "The Trial of the Fox", VI. "The Sheep and the Dog", XI. "The Wolf and the Wether" and XII. "The Wolf and the Lamb".

The first two fables, “The Fox and the Wolf” and “The Trial of the Fox”, belong to the beast-epic’s tradition, where the main character is the sly fox. Indeed, the kid in “The Fox and the Wolf” and the lamb in “The Trial of the Fox” are inevitable victims of the fox’s greed. In the first tale the fox grabs a kid from a flock of goats and drowns it dipping it a number of times in the water of a river in the attempt to rename it ‘salmond’. This ritual would enables it to eat the dead kid without guilt. At the end of the fable the keeper of the herd will shoot the fox’s earth with an arrow ‘and for his kid and uther violence, he tuke his skyn and maid ane recompence’ (773-74).

In the second tale, “The Trial of the Fox”, always the skilled fox, looking for water, meets by chance a small flock of lambs and it cannot resist the temptation to kill the fattest one and therefore to eat its fill. This will be the reason of its end. A ewe, the mother of the killed lamb, before the king accuses the fox and asks for justice. A jury finds the fox guilty and the lion gives sentence: the fox is summarily hanged.

In the other three fables, of Aesopic tradition, the sheep character interacts with other animals but the final consequences are similar to those of the previous episodes. The only positive, even though small, consolation is that it can express its opinion, which often appears logic and reasonable, but which before transgressors and domineering characters it is only a waste of energy.

In “The Wolf and the Wether” a wether volunteers to wear the dead dog’s hide and for a while protects the shepherd’s flock. One day a hungry wolf takes a lamb from the flock and the wether chases it incessantly, even when the wolf drops the lamb. The chase continues through bush and briar where branches tear away the

dog's hide and the wolf sees that its pursuer is the wether. Finally, the wether is killed.

The same end occurs to the lamb of "The Wolf and the Lamb". At a river a poor lamb is drinking downstream from a wolf. The latter becomes angry and with absurd claims wants to punish it. Although the lamb makes all the right legal arguments, eventually the wolf kills it.

The till now unexplored fable of this group is "The Sheep and the Dog", which begins

> Esope ane taill puttis in memorie
> How that ane doig because that he wes pure,
> Callit ane scheip unto the consistorie,
> Ane certane breid fra him for to recure. (1146-49)

A dog acts against a sheep in a dispute about a loaf of bread. The jurisdictional authority is 'ane fraudfull wolff', which sends a summons to the sheep. Legal forms are observed throughout the fable and even the summons is done in proper legal style. 'Under the panis off hie suspensioun, off grit cursing, and interdictioun' (1156-57) 'Schir' sheep, which is also a priest, is compelled to compare before the judge and answer the dog. Besides the wolf as judge, the court is made of the raven as summoner, the fox as clerk and notary and the kite and the vulture as 'advocatis expert in to the lawis'. The two latter take together the dog's defence to have the sentence against the sheep 'thocht it wes fals, thay had na conscience' (1180).

The sheep, using its own wits and without advocate, gives its defence against the case: "Heir I declyne the juge, the tyme, the place." (1187) These are three valid points: the judge and the other members of the court are its 'ennemies mortall' and therefore their objectivity is open to question; the hearing is taking place, first, far from its home, and second, in the evening, a time of day considered illegal.

Surprisingly, its appeal is taken under consideration by the court and two arbiters, the bear and the badger, are chosen from the parties to settle whether the sheep's objections are acceptable or not. If they were not, the court might then proceed to sentence. The arbiters are apparently scrupulous in their duties, and after a long discussion through legal terms and references they respond, as the facts make already perceive, that the trial must go on.

> The scheip agane befoir the wolff derenyeit,
> But advocate, abasitlie couth stand. (1230-31)

The dog contends the bread that the sheep owes it and afterwards the sheep is trapped in a mass of legal snares which bring to a quick and clear verdict.

> This cursit court, corruptit all for meid,
> Agains gude faith, gude law, and eik conscience,
> For this fals doig pronuncit the sentence. (1241-43)

The wolf's sentence orders the sheep, under the pain of interdict, to pay a sum of silver or the bread. The author, who from the beginning is on the side of the poor and during the trial does not conceal his disapproval of the evil conduct of the corrupted court, finally voices his sad conclusion:

> Off this sentence, allace, quhat sall I say,
> Quhilk dampnit hes the selie innocent,
> And justifyit the wrangous jugement? (1248-50)

The last stanza can title "the harrowing end of an innocent victim".

> The scheip, dreidand mair persecutioun,
> Obeyit to the sentence, and couth tak
> His way unto ane merchand off the toun,
> And sauld the woll that he bure on his bak,
> Syne bocht the breid, and to the doig couth mak
> Reddie payment, as he commandit was;
> Naikit and bair syne to the feild couth pas. (1251-57)

2.7.4.1. The features and behaviour of the sheep

The bestiary gives essential physical and behavioural descriptions of the sheep

and the lamb. "The sheep is a soft animal with wool"[209], indeed it is an animal with a downy coat. Its mainly feature is that it is a meek, harmless and placid animal. Two etymologies are proposed: the Latin name of the lamb, *agnus*, may come from the Greek word for pious, that is the sign of its natural goodness; alternatively, *agnus* may derive from *agnosco*, because it recognizes, among all the other animals of the flock, its mother's bleating and reaches it straightway to suckle its milk.[210] Likewise, its mother recognizes it among many similar-looking and sounding and takes care of its lamb only with motherly love. This loving relation between the sheep and its lamb is recognizable in the fable "The Trial of the Fox", when, before the king, the ewe falls upon its knees and asks, crying, for justice for its killed lamb.

> Put out hir playnt on this wyis wofully
> "This harlet huresone and this hound off hell,
> He devorit hes my lamb full doggitly." (1070-72)

The lamb that suckles its mother's milk recalls the tender words of the poor lamb in "The Wolf and the Lamb", which to defend itself from the false accusation of the wolf declares

> Alswa my lippis, sen that I wes ane lam,
> Tuitchit na thing that wes contagious,
> Bot sowkit milk from pappis off my dam,
> Richt naturall, sweit, and als delitious. (2651-54)

In the fables "The Fox and the Wolf", "The Trial of the Fox" and "The Wolf and the Wether" the poor three young animals, respectively a kid and two lambs, that are grabbed from their flock by the ravenous predators (the fox and the wolf), have no characterization and they do not say a word, probably they would not have the time. Their quick appearance and disappearance give only a hint about their unawareness and harmlessness against the predators' danger. This is their only guilt

[209] Barber, p. 77.
[210] Barber, pp. 80-81.

in their unlucky end. The first two kids are horribly slain and devoured by the fox, the last is luckily dropped by the wolf to run away from the fierce hound.

Dwelling on this fierce hound of the "The Wolf and the Wether", the reader knows from the beginning of this fable that it is in fact the wether disguised in the dead hound's skin so as to protect the flock. The wheter, a neutered male sheep, belongs to the same ovine family of the lamb and the sheep. Perhaps in Henryson's time it could also represent the entire male sheep, the ram. Having said that, its free and active participation in the action is unquestionable and unusual in the "family" tradition. Indeed, it introduces an unexpected new element by making an offer to the sad shepherd, whose hound has died.

> "Maister," quod he, "mak merie and be blyith:
> To brek your hart for baill it is na bute;
> For ane deid dog ye na cair on yow kyith.
> Ga fetche him hither and fla his skyn off swyth;
> Syne sew it on me – and luke that it be meit,
> Baith heid and crag, bodie, taill, and feit.
>
> Than will the wolff trow that I am he,
> For I sall follow him fast quhar ever he fair.
> All haill the cure I tak it upon me
> Your scheip to keip at midday, lait, and air:
> And he persew, be God, I sall not spair
> To follow him as fast as did your doig,
> Swa that I warrand ye sall not want ane hoig." (2477-89)

Therefore, this bold wether takes the hound's place and perhaps also the shepherd's one, since he leaves the scene. Its conduct is faultless and it keeps control until a hungry wolf steals a lamb from the flock. The wolf runs away with the wether in hot pursuit. The chase becomes faster and faster, almost at physical strength's limit. The wether seems so strong and resolute that, although it gets the wolf to leave the prey, it continues the pursuit, saying "It is not the lamb, bot the, that I desyre" (2535). Previously, it has presumptuously made a vow to God that it should have the wolf. It would be a curious behaviour even for a hound whose normal duty is to take

care of the components of the flock. Indeed, it seems that pride has taken control on the wether and makes it act almost as a ravenous predator. However, when the hound's hide gets caught in a briar and the wether appears as it actually is, the matter changes.

Aware of the order of the state of nature, the wether becomes again the prey and the wolf its 'maister'. In the further confrontation with the wolf's increasing anger it can only humbly bleat false excuses:

> "Schir," quod the wedder, "suppois I ran in hy,
> My mynd wes never to do your persoun ill.
> Ane flear gettis ane follower commounly,
> In play or ernist, preif quha sa ever will.
> Sen I bot playit, be gracious me till,
> And I sall gar my freindis blis your banis:
> Ane full gude servand will crab his maister anis." (2574-80)

The wolf, however, unconvinced by these excuses, takes its revenge killing the wether.

The lamb of "The Wolf and the Lamb" is a defenceless young animal which still sucks its mother's milk. The ravenous wolf is there to devour it and it will not want to listen to reason. Indeed, the lamb not only begs for mercy, but it tries to defend itself against the false and unfounded accusations of the wolf. Despite its young age, it has a conscientious behaviour but it is ingenuous to believe that its foes would be fair and reasonable. Indeed, it bases its plea on law and true logic. However, it can do nothing against the wolf's indifference and cruelty.

The case of the sheep called to appear before a judge, 'ane fraudfull wolff', to answer charge raised by a dog in "The Sheep and the Dog" is similar to the misfortune of the lamb in the previous tale.

> The selie scheip durst lay na mouth on eird
> Till he befoir the awfull juge appeird. (1170-71)

The natural features of the opposing parts of the trial could already be

sufficient to realize that the sheep is in the lion's den. Furthermore, as if that was not enough, the accusation is false and the court bribed and fraudulent. However, the sheep's strong belief in reason and justice helps it not to lose heart. It is innocent and also not ignorant. It pleads its own defence and says resolutely "Heir I declyne the juge, the tyme, the place" (1187), and carefully gives all its reasons:

> This is my cause, in motive and effect:
> The law sayis it is richt perrillous
> Till enter in pley befoir ane juge suspect,
> And ye, Schir Wolff, hes bene richt odious
> To me, for with your tuskis ravenous
> Hes slane full mony kinnismen off myne;
> Thairfoir as juge suspect I yow declyne.
>
> And schortlie, of this court ye memberis all,
> Baith assessouris, clerk, and advocate,
> To me and myne ar ennemies mortall
> And ay hes bene, as mony scheipheird wate.
> The place is fer, the tyme is feriate,
> Quhairfoir na juge suld sit in consistory
> Sa lait at evin: I yow accuse for thy. (1188-1201)

The judge bids the parties to choose two arbiters. This consideration of the sheep's appeal seems a glimmer of justice. However, it soon fails and the sheep must stand trial in the wolf's court. It learns that there is not a fair instrument of appeal. Finally, the wolf puts the sentence into execution and the sheep, 'the selie innocent', is condemned. The sentence is a strong humiliation for the sheep because, to meet its obligation, it must deprive itself of the little it has. Indeed, it has to sell the fleece from its back, remaining naked and unprotected against the rigour of the winter.

2.7.4.2. The symbolic meaning of the sheep

In "The Fox and the Wolf" and "The Trial of the Fox" the kid, the lamb and the ewe are not main characters. The most important actors of these fables (the fox, the wolf, the lion and the mare) almost exclusively catch Henryson's attention and therefore Henryson concentrates his moral meanings and interpretation on them.

The members of the sheep's family are simply the victims of the evil predator.

Their taking part to the plot, or better their quickly being used is a usual situation. However, they highlight the greed and high-handed attitude of the fox and are the cause of its ruin. In "The Fox and the Wolf" the fox is killed by the shepherd and in "The Trial of the Fox" the fox is on trial for the murder of the lamb, it is found guilty and, therefore, is condemned to death. To come to a conclusion, they are the earthly temptation for the fox.

"The Sheep and the Dog" contains political and figurative implications. The tale is an obvious attack on malpractices which had appeared in certain courts of justice: undoubtedly the ecclesiastical courts. Because of its structure, members and penalties, the court of the tale is recognizable as a religious organization.[211] Henryson, as an experienced church lawyer, would be probably very familiar with what happened in certain areas of church jurisdiction, and there is no doubt that he was disappointed about it. His intent is to investigate the legal problem of the poor and humble people, probably the peasants, through the sheep's experience. It is indisputable that, from the beginning, Henryson takes a stand on the side of the poor. The *Moralitas* clearly stresses the metaphorical meaning of each animal and, from this point of view, the sheep represents 'the figure of pure commounis' who are too often oppressed by 'tirrane men'. As the sheep learns to its cost during the trial, man should not put its trust in earthly institutions, especially for the administration of the justice. In the last stanza of the *Moralitas* Henryson's sorrowful plea to God could be that of a peasant:

> We pure pepill as now may do no moir
> Bot pray to the: sen that we ar opprest
> In to this eirth, grant us in hevin gude rest. (1318-20)

The situation of the lamb in "The Wolf and the Lamb" is similar to that of the

[211] Kindrick, *Robert Henryson,* p. 81.

sheep in the previous tale. Also the lamb tries to defend itself from the false charge of the wolf. However, it makes the same mistake as the sheep in believing that the ravenous wolf would be reasonable and fair. Indeed, Henryson is still considering the peasants' condition and trials due to the tyrannical oppressors of the upper social classes. The social implications of the *Moralitas* repeats essentially that of the "The Sheep and the Dog". The lamb signifies 'pure pepill', including merchants and labourer, whose life is 'half ane purgatorie'. Therefore, at the end of the fable, Henryson appeals to God to take care of this poor and innocent man.

> God keip the lamb, quhilk is the innocent,
> From wolfis byit and men extortioneris. (2770-71)

The interpretation of "The Wolf and the Wether" is intentionally left to the end, because it differs significantly from those of the other fables. The traditional association of the sheep with the victimized lower class as in "The Sheep and the Dog" and in "The Wolf and the Lamb" is changed. The wether represents all the same the 'pure mens', but it is certainly not without moral blemish. Its intention to help the shepherd is good, of course, but when it puts on the hound's skin it exceeds its duties in the framework of the natural world. This is also the real reason of the wolf's anger, which, beyond the deadly fear it has felt, is particularly worried about the reversal of roles that the sheep generates in the hierarchical order of nature. The eager sheep has developed the ill effect of pride and its collateral presumption. The cause is probably the dog's skin, 'that riches of array' (2595) which would symbolize the wealth to which the poor man aspires. This presumption leads the wether to its destruction. In his *Moralitas* Heryson expresses perfectly this concept

> Heir may thow se that riches of array
> Will cause pure men preumpteous for to be;
> Thay think thay hald of nane, he thay als gay,
> Bot counterfute ane lord in all degré.

Out of thair cais in pryde thay clym sa hie
That thay forbeir thair better in na steid,
Quhill sum man tit thair heillis over thair heid. (2595-2601)

Furthermore, he finds this presumption also in highest level of the society where man's rank is based on appearance and the power given to him exceeds its real role and origin. All the narrative part of the tale suggests an analogy with the incident of the Lauder rebellion of 1482, in which the nobles rose against the financial burden of James III's courtiers. The sheep certainly represents also these latter people, whose presumption and arrogance probably put at risk the highest order of the society.

2.7.5. The Lion

Two fables deal with the lion: V. "The Trial of the Fox" and VII. "The Lion and the Mouse". The plot of the first fable has already been seen both for the fox and for the wolf.

The forty-three stanzas of "The Lion and the Mouse" form a dream-vision. This literary kind was very important in European literature from the later thirteenth to the early sixteenth century. Its characteristics are found also in English works, such as Chaucer's *The House of Fame* and *The Parliament of Fowls*, Langland's *Piers Plowman* and *The Kingis Quair* of James I of Scotland. Generally, the subject were often some aspects of courtly love, but it was not necessarily a prerequisite.[212] "The Lion and the Mouse" shares many features with this genre: the first-person narration, the main action that takes place in the course of a dream or a vision where the perplexed author reaches the solution to a dilemma through enlightened minds.

In "The Lion and the Mouse" the first twelve stanzas form the *Prologue* of the

[212] MacQueen, p. 153.

tale, in which Henryson's narrator wakes on a June morning and goes walking in a delightful forest. When the sun heats the day, he arrives under a hawthorn tree. There he lies down, closes his eyes and falls asleep. Then he dreams of 'the fairest man that ever befoir I saw' (1348) coming through the forest to him. The memorable guide of Henryson proves to be 'master Aesop'. Therefore, Henryson asks Aesop to tell him one of his 'prettie fabill concludand with ane gude moralitie' (1386-87).

At first Aesop denies but when Hernryson makes a second request he gives in and begins the tale of the lion and the mouse. The following fable that Henryson describes through Aesop's voice is based on the story line about a lion which grab the mouse running up and down upon it and it grants it mercy instead of swallowing it; later, when the lion is caught in a net by the hunters, the mouse comes and gnaws away the ropes that bound the king of the beasts. Naturally Henryson's fable is rich in details and the dialogues between lion and mouse are, as usual, a noteworthy elements of the characterization of the animals.

2.7.5.1. The features and behaviour of the lion

The bestiary gives the lion the first place in the sequence of animals. It appears indisputably as the king of beasts for its strength and fierceness. All animals are scared before it and it is not afraid of facing anything. However, there are some exceptions (scorpion, snake, leontophones, etc.). Moreover, it is endowed with numerous physical and behavioural features, even if some of them are not so "real", such as its three main "naturae" which convey Christian messages and that will be considered in the following section.

In "The Trial of the Fox" the lion is king and as king it has the power to proclaim, through its herald, the unicorn, the parliament. The herald's parchment

contains the king's intent:

> My celsitude and hie magnificence
> Lattis yow to wit, that evin incontinent,
> Thinkis the morne with royall deligence
> Upon this hill to hald ane parliament.
> Straitlie thairfoir I gif commandement
> For to compeir before my tribunall,
> Under all pane and perrell that may fall. (859-65)

It is far from being a gentle invitation. Indeed, it seems a proper summons and the assembly portrayed is more a court of justice than a parliament in the modern sense.

The following day, in the preparation of the royal court, the lion's wealth is displaied. Meanwhile all animals assemble, in the order of their presumed social status and 'for dreid off deith, thay droupit all in dout' (925). All the presents hold it in awe and are waiting for its speech with bated breath.

The following words of great majesty exalt its own royal power which is mingled with its mercy everyday. Indeed, the animals that are lying prostrate to it are safe. However, all those which belittle or doubt its royal magnificence will be hard treated. Pride is not admitted to the king's presence, but its haughty declaration about its own might is the clear sign that pride is the predominant characteristic of the lion's personality. Perhaps, being the king it can do everything, also what it detests and bans in the other animals' behaviour.

Afterwards, the lion decrees the no-belligerence in its kingdom with these words:

> Se neir be twentie mylis quhair I am
> The kid ga saiflie be the gaittis syde,
> The tod Lowrie luke not to the lam,
> Na revand beistis nouther ryn nor ryde. (943-46)

This fair principle should be respected all over the human world, to guarantee to everybody a world of peace. The observance of this royal law is a strong duty in the

lion's government. The fox's non-observance of this royal peace (it kills and eats the lamb) will be the reason of its consequent death.

In the development of the fable the lion shows also its shrewdness in readily unmasking the cheating fox and its outburst of anger at the fox's attempt to refuse its forced mission to call the mare. Beside mighty, majestic, imposing, authoritarian and proud, other two adjectives can then be added to the lion's personality: shrewd and quick-tempered. Furthermore, it has also a sarcastic sense of humour, when, seeing the red (because broken) head of the wolf, it says the proverb "the greitest clerkis ar not the wysest men" (1064).

In this case, where for the lion's character there are two fables of different tradition – "The Trial of the Fox" belongs to the beast-epic tradition while "The Lion and the Mouse" is an Aesopic fable – a typical difference between the two seems to be more perceptible than in other occasions. I mean that, while in "The Trial of the Fox" from the beginning the reader is projected in a human society that, even if populated by animals, tries to follow the rules of civil life, in "The Lion and the Mouse" the sensation is that of being absorbed in the natural world with its real animals. Perhaps this sensation is encouraged by the opening *Prologue* which is set in the countryside with a delightful forest. The reader, already immersed in the beauties of nature, follows this underlying theme. However, the beasts' features and behaviour seems to be more instinctive than led by reason. Indeed, the fable begins

> Ane lyoun, at his pray wery foirrun,
> To recreat his limmis and to rest,
> Beikand his breist and belly at the sun,
> Under ane tre lay in the fair forest. (1405-08)

It sounds like an empirical description of the lion's usual behaviour during the observation by an ethologist. It lies so still that a troop of nimble and lively mice

begins to race and caper upon it. At last, the lion wakes and grabs fast in its paw the 'maister mous'. From here onwards the story, of course, cannot be considered a naturalist treatise. However, despite the human attitude, the animals preserve a little evidence of their instinctive "dignity".

The lion's immediate response to this capital offence shows its pride of rank:

> Thow cative wretche and vile unworthie thing,
> Over malapart and eik presumpteous
> Thow wes, to mak out over me thy tripping.
> Knew thow not weill I wes baith lord and king
> Off beistis all? (1427-31)

Aware of its guilt and of its social inferiority, the humble mouse employs its energies to defend itself. It begs the royal pardon and explains that the mice' crime is attributed to pure negligence rather than to malice. Moreover, all the mice thought that it were dead. This is not a good excuse for the lion because, even if it had been killed, the mice should give its image the true homage due to its royal role, dropping, in fear, upon their knees.

The lion however is not completely deaf. Indeed, it is disposed to listen to the mouse, which is able to appeal for 'grace and remissioun' (1439). The mouse's reasoning fairly impresses the lion, which, after its last prophetic plea

> My lyfe is lytill worth, my deith is les,
> Yit and I leif I may peradventure
> Supple your hienes beand in distres;
> For oft is sene, ane man off small stature
> Reskewit hes ane lord off hie honour,
> Keipit that wes, in poynt to be overthrawin
> Throw misfortoun: sic cace may be your awin. (1496-1502)

opens its paw and lets the mouse free. Afterwards, it returns to its natural activity 'for he had nocht, bot levit on his pray'(1511): hunting. Meanwhile the human hunters have found a way to catch the lion with a 'strang nettis'. It is captured into the net and all its attempts to loosen the ropes are vain. When its strength is exhausted it lies

weakly. Its own unwise trust in its power and magnificent role becomes shaky. In this condition its pride and arrogance can do nothing. However, a solution to this predicament appears in the form of the mice which have been running over it before. The mouse recognizes the lion and, to return its earlier mercy, groups the other mice and together they chew the ropes that bind the king. Tiny beast which have little power have given it back its freedom 'because he had pietie'(1569).

2.7.5.2. The symbolic meaning of the lion

The bestiary deals with three main "naturae" of the lion, which are properly shaped in order to provide an allegory of events and significant principles of the Christian doctrine.

In the first version the lion roams about the mountain peaks and when it smells the scent of the hunter it wipes out its tracks so that he cannot find it. Here the lion symbolizes Jesus Christ, who, sent by the Father from the Kingdom of Heaven (the mountain peaks), hides from the devil (the hunter) the tracks of his descent, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, to redeem lost mankind.

The second version describes the anecdote that when the lion sleeps, it seems to have its eyes open. It refers to Christ whose body fell asleep on the Cross, while his divine nature remained awake.

In the third nature we are told that when the cubs of the lion are born they are dead. The lioness watches over them for three days until the lion comes and, breathing on them, brings them to life, as God does when, on the third day, he awoke from the dead his son, Christ. The lion's figure represents God and Christ, the highest symbols in the Christian creed. These concepts are far from what this animal represents in Henryson's fables.

In "The Trial of the Fox" it is indubitable that the lion is the king. In the royal seal of Scotland there are heraldic references to the unicorn, the summoner of the lion, and the three leopards, which in Henryson's fable will set the royal court, and represent the king of England who supported the king of Scots.[213] Furthermore, the words of the lion

> I lat yow wit, my micht is merciabill
> And steiris nane than ar to me prostrait;
> Angrie, austerne, and als unamyabill
> To all that standfray ar to myne estait. (929-32)

are an adaptation of two Scottish royal mottes, *Parcere prostrates scit nobilis ira leonis* and *Nemo me impune lacessit*, the latter of which still can be found in the current "Scottish" one-pound coin.[214] Therefore, the clues show that the lion is the king of Scotland. The estates of Scottish society are represented by all types of animals that appear before the king. The animals assemble mainly for their 'dreid off deith'. The lion makes it plain that it has the arbitrary power – mingled with mercy – to raise to high estate or to crush any one of them. This reveals its tyrannical nature.

The royal mission to the mare is an indication to the diplomatic relations between James III and the church. Indeed, throughout his reign, there was a controversy between the church and the king. The attempt to persuade the mere through its two dubious ambassadors will probably symbolize the attempt of the crown to extend its power on the church's authority.[215]

In the *Moralitas* the lion becomes the world to whom both common man and king bow down, hoping that from it they will increase their pleasure and wealth. The pursuit of earthly riches is for mankind the cause of its ruin.

In a dream-vision generally the opening verses set out a dilemma, the solution

[213] MacQueen, p. 230.
[214] MacQueen, p. 230.
[215] Kindrick, *Robert Henryson*, p. 93.

of which is indicated during the dream. Instead, in "The Lion and the Mouse" the author waits for Aesop's final words, in the *Moralitas*, to recognize the question, which, however, is implied in the earlier narrative and its setting. As the *Moralitas* shows, the nature, the delightful forest that 'off all pleasance wes plenteous', stands for the world which is part of the problem. Indeed, the mutability of the seasons reveals the world's dangerousness. The pleasure of the summer changes during the year, as the world deceives everyone that believes blindly in earthly promises and richness. Its inhabitants, in this fable, the lion and the mice show a lack of prudence, in giving themselves over to the immediate pleasure of the world.[216] The lion enjoys very much lying down and sleeping beside a tree in the forest. This recalls the fox's reckless behaviour in "The Fox and the Wolf", before it is shot by the shepherd of the killed kid. The lion's imprudence has no immediate effects. The irresponsible mice dancing over its body may already indicate the lion's carelessness which will allow the hunters to trap it in their net.[217] In both cases, the imprudence of the lion and the mouse, will take them to risk their own life.

The *Moralitas* gives clear indication on the anthropological meaning of the lion. Aesop says:

> As I suppois, this mychtie gay lyoun
> May signifie ane prince or empriour,
> Ane potestate, or yit ane king with croun,
> Quhilk suld be walkrife gyde and governour
> Of his pepill, that takis na labour
> To reule and steir the land, and justice keip,
> Bot lyis still in lustis, sleuth, and sleip. (1573-79)

He interprets the lion in terms of different kinds of ruler, which should govern their people and not spend all their time in pleasure, sloth and sleep. The lion's character is obviously more political in its interpretation. Indeed, it seems to be James III and

[216] MacQueen, p. 155.
[217] MacQueen, pp. 154-161.

therefore his noble stature is undermined by its many vices. Henryson has been very cautious in this fable by placing the tale in the mouth of Aesop. The qualities that Henryson emphasizes and considers of high value are those that were most lacking in James III. The first, an active participation in political life, is soon disregarded. The lion's inactivity that allows the mice to run back and forth over it without fear, refers to the king's withdrawal from the affair of government, which probably encourages the interference of other dubious people. When such sloth refers to a king and limits his effectiveness in his position in the affairs of state, it is difficult to pass over. The contemporary chronicles and satires often revealed James' indolence.[218]

The second quality would be temperance that sharply contrasts the lion's arrogance and indulgence. The lion's capricious and angry cruelty toward the mouse is a clear example.

The other two qualities, justice and mercy, are kept together in the mouse's imploring plea to the lion.

> In everie juge mercy and reuth suld be
> As assessouris and collaterall;
> Without mercie, justice is crueltie,
> As said is in the lawis spirituall.
> Quhen rigour sittis in the tribunall,
> The equitie off law quha may sustene?
> Richt few or nane, but mercie gang betwene. (1468-74)

For its trial the mouse claims fairness which is considered by it the proper object of law. The rigour of law is cruel because it does not ponder different applications to particular circumstances.[219] Indeed, the rigid system of law has not a fair and reasonable way of behaving towards people. Thus, it would require the infusion of mercy. The fairness and mercy demanded by the mouse have a legal as well as religious significance.

[218] Kindrick, *Robert Henryson*, p. 103.
[219] Kindrick, *Robert Henryson*, p. 104.

At the end of the mouse's plea the lion has mercy and offers it a full pardon. The same thing that Henryson asks the 'lordis of prudence' in the *Moralitas*: to consider the value of mercy's power, to remit sometimes a sore offence and to let some pity play a part in their judgment. The circumstances in which the lion is caught in the hunters' trap should recall them how quickly a lord of great reputation can fall from his position, deceived by the danger of the fleeting wealth of the world.[220]

Even if the role of the hunters is important to understand the political allegory, Henryson refuses to provide specifics about them. He states only that they are 'rurall men' seeking revenge and lets this mysterious message 'king and lord may weill wit quhat I mene' (1613).

[220] Kindrick, *Robert Henryson*, p. 105.

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